

TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE

An Introduction to the Writing Process

*Tools and Techniques for Helping Students
Turn Raw Ideas into Polished Prose*

by
Steve Peha


teaching that makes sense
www.ttms.org



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“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

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An Introduction to the Writing Process

As a formal method for teaching writing, Writing Process goes back to the early 1970's when dozens of academic articles¹ inquiring into the nature of the compositional process began to appear. But writing as a process goes back even further than that—way, way back. Indeed, all writers have used one “process” or another to render their ideas in print, it’s the nature of the beast; words just don’t magically materialize on a page or a computer screen every time we want them to. So writing as a process is as old as writing itself. It’s just that in the last 30 years or so, we’ve thought to inquire about exactly what processes might best be shown to students to help them grow as writers.

Been There, Done That

At one time or another, we’ve all been there: first draft, final draft, done. And for many of us, the final draft probably consisted of little more than recopying our teacher’s red pen corrections. Here’s what one class was like for me:

7th grade. Hell hath no fury like Mr. Hackworth. A most mercurial man. Tall, dark hair and beard, piercing stare, earth-shattering voice, ego-crushing demeanor. He had no trouble getting our attention and keeping it. His class was a series of rituals: weekly news quiz, worksheets, and *the research paper*. The quizzes and worksheets I could handle, but I was completely unprepared for the paper. The longest thing I think I had written up to that point was about five pages. Suddenly, there were rumors in circulation about students from the previous year’s class topping 50; someone even said that one paper was over 100 pages long.

To get us started off on the right foot, Mr. Hackworth introduced us to his version of the writing process: [1] Choose a country; [2] Make sure you cover history, economics, climate, geography, government, etc.; [3] Write in pen; [4] Hand in the paper before Christmas break. That was it. We received no additional instruction whatsoever on how such a report was to be researched or written.

Sound familiar? No wonder so many of us struggled to get our work done—or even to get started. As much as I love writing now, I hated it during school. And I think part of my frustration came from not knowing anything about how to write, that is, how to go about the business of carefully crafting a piece of prose from beginning to end.

Writing is a Process, Isn’t it?

Like any academic theory, Writing Process has evolved considerably over the years, but two beliefs have remained constant: [1] Methods of teaching writing should be structured to account for the fact that the creation of a piece of writing is a developmental process that occurs over time; and [2] Writers engage in different activities depending on which stage of development a piece of writing is in.

¹ The most important of these articles have been conveniently collected into a book called *Landmark Essays on Writing Process*, edited by Sondra Perl and published by Hermagoras Press. This is a wonderful book which not only includes essays by academics but also by professional writers like Annie Dillard and William Stafford. It really goes far beyond Writing Process to more general discussions of writing itself. I highly recommend it.

Writing Process as a method of helping student writers has always, to my knowledge, been conceived of as a set of discrete stages wherein a writer engages in certain activities designed to solve particular problems unique to that stage. And it is this practical problem-solving approach that I think makes Writing Process and other contemporary approaches more effective than traditional methods which often attempted to teach writing in a manner that ran counter to the ways in which writers naturally go about their work.

As it was initially conceived, the process had only two stages: drafting and revising; the writer was said to cycle back and forth between them until a piece was finished. While this is probably the most accurate reflection of how writers work, it isn't very useful in the classroom; student writers seem to benefit from a bit more structure. In the 1980's, Writing Process theories crystallized into something most of us are now familiar with: a five stage process that includes Pre-Writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing.

But now in the 1990's, we have further refinements that, at least in my experience, have truly made Writing Process valuable to student writers working in the classroom, and to teachers trying to help them. There are now three distinct ways of looking at Writing Process:

<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Contemporary</i>	<i>Primary</i>
No Assessment Stages	Criteria-Based	Modified for K-2 Writers
Pre-Writing	Pre-Writing	Pre-Writing
Drafting	Drafting	Drafting
	Sharing	Sharing
Revising	Revising	<i>Optional or Limited</i>
Editing	Editing	<i>Optional of Limited</i>
Publishing	Publishing	Publishing
	Assessing	<i>Optional or Limited</i>

With the incredible popularity nationwide of criteria-based assessment, and the recognition of the power of criteria-based instruction in all subject areas, the traditional process has been expanded to accommodate the use of criteria like those in the Six Traits approach. This only makes good sense. According to research the use of criteria by student writers as a tool for focused revision is the single most important and most valuable technique we can employ², so having two distinct stages (Sharing and Assessing) for this activity is well warranted. Without formal recourse to criteria, students cannot effectively shape their writing in the Revising stage, nor can they assess their own progress after Publishing. I recommend that teachers take students through the contemporary seven-stage process making appropriate changes for writers in grades K-2 who are not yet revising.³

² See *Research in Written Composition* by Robert Hillocks, Jr. published by NCTE.

³ Some very young writers can and do revise. But many just aren't interested. I recommend introducing all writers to the full process, but making all stages after Drafting optional for K-2 writers. I don't absolutely require kids to go through the whole process until mid-year 3rd grade, and even I will let some "slide by" until they feel more comfortable. By 4th grade, all students should be mature enough to deal with the demands of working on the same piece of writing over a long period of time in a more detailed and more technical way.

Why is it Important to Teach Writing Process?

Writing Process is the “how” of writing. Think about it for a minute. How do you write? There’s much more to it than just putting pen to paper or dangling your fingers over a keyboard. Consciously or not, most writers go through a predictable set of stages as their work evolves. Those stages—our own individual writing process—evolve slowly over time as we develop, and as the nature of our writing changes. As competent adult writers, we all have a writing process. But when you’re young, just starting out, you really have no idea what to do first, where to go next, or how to finish up. Small children reach for a pencil before they have any idea what they want to write. Older students may sit in class for days complaining that they can’t get started. The Writing Process gives inexperienced writers a simple, dependable structure they can follow, a foolproof plan of attack that will always yield results. By helping students with the process of writing, we free them up to put more effort into the execution of their ideas.

From a teacher’s perspective, Writing Process is extremely helpful because it solves some very basic, but all too common, problems:

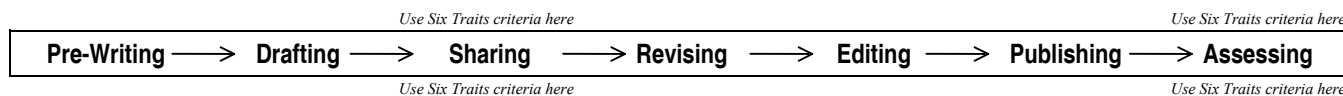
Common Problems Solved by Using Writing Process

- **Students don’t know how to get started:** No problem, just introduce them to Pre-Writing activities like brainstorming, webbing, mapping, freewriting, or listing.
- **Students don’t write because they are afraid of making errors:** Tell students they will have a chance to make corrections during the Editing stage.
- **Low productivity; students don’t write very much:** Pre-Writing activities like free writing increase fluidity of expression; the knowledge that things can be changed during Revising frees students up to experiment.
- **No effort in Revision; no ability to rethink earlier drafts:** By teaching focused lessons in specific writing skills, and showing students how to use the Six Traits criteria, young writers become interested in and committed to serious revision.
- **Sloppy work; no attention to detail in final drafts:** By reserving a special stage for Publishing, and creating authentic publishing opportunities for your students to publish their work, you can show them how important this aspect of writing really is, and you can give them specific lessons in how to go about it.

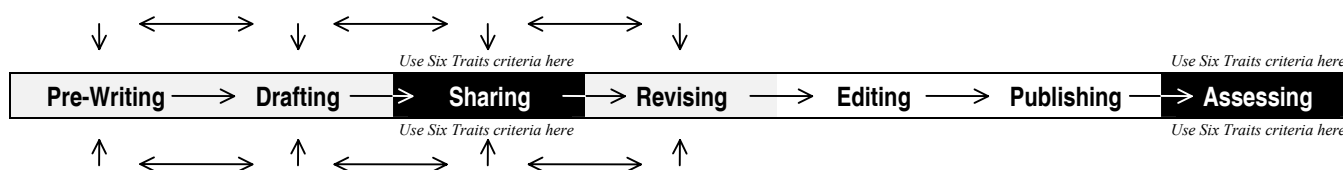
Last but not least, Writing Process is a required component of the Washington State Essential Academic Learnings for Writing. Like it or not, Writing Process is the law in this state. Students are expected to know it inside and out.

But is the Writing Process Real?

Yes and no. No professional writer that I’ve ever heard of goes through seven distinct stages with each piece (or any number of distinct stages for that matter). I know I certainly don’t. Competent adult writers tend to pursue all of the stages more or less simultaneously. We cycle: we think of an idea, write it down, read it over, change it a little, fix a typo, format it... and then we start the cycle all over again. Students will cycle, too, though probably not as dynamically or as purposefully when they’re just starting out. So, rather than a fixed set of stages each writer goes through, like this:



It's better to conceive of the process as less of a one-shot assembly line affair and more like a flexible, dynamic system that will vary to some extent with the individual needs of the writer and the type of writing he or she is trying to do:



Of course all of this speculation about the creative inner life of writers begs the obvious question: if nobody really uses *the* Writing Process, why do we teach it at all? Here's how I look at it:

The most important contribution of the process writing movement has not been the revelation of a single most productive, most perfect, and most proper way of writing. It is merely the idea that there *are* ways of writing: predictable paths good writers follow that lead them step-by-step to the successful rendering of their ideas in print. There is no single writing process, no "secret formula" known only to a select cadre of award-winning educators, elite researchers, and literary mavens. Writing *is* a process in and of itself. And it is the recognition of this simple fact that has so significantly influenced the way our best teachers teach writing today. Once we acknowledge that writing is not a spontaneous act, but rather a series of discrete events scattered through stages that unfold over time, we can begin to guide young authors through those stages, so that ultimately they can guide themselves.

I teach students the contemporary seven stage process (even if I don't require writers in grades K-2 to use it, I still tell them about all the stages and invite them to try it out), and I take them through it until they know it cold. As they experience more success and begin to develop a sense of what works best for them, I give my students more latitude to find their own ways of getting things done. But when they get stuck, I send them right back to the seven stages again. Eventually, they develop a way of writing that works best for them that incorporates all of the components I have introduced. I use Writing Process more as a problem-solving mechanism than as a way of monitoring student progress or long term development. You see, whether or not writers pursue the stages deliberately, it is a simple reality of the task that anyone who attempts any kind of formal composition must eventually draw from each of the seven "wells" in order to nourish their work from beginning to end. What I like to say to teachers is this: Writing Process is a tool, not a rule. And it usually works best when it's used in that context. Instead of telling students: "Here's something you have to do.", tell them "Here's something that will help you out. Give it a try and then take a little bit of time to assess how well it works for you.

The “Writing Process” Organizer

<div>★ PRE-WRITING</div> <div>Explore Your Topic</div> <div>Pre-writing is any activity that helps writers figure out what to write about. Many things qualify as pre-writing activities. The strategies that I have had success with are:<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ T-Chart Topics. (Love/Hate, Typical/Unusual, Fun/Not Fun, etc.)★ Topic Equations. (in Math, Science, and Social Studies.)★ What-Why-How.★ Idea-Details and Tell-Show.★ Draw-Label-Caption.★ Action-Feelings-Setting.★ Transition-Action-Details.★ Content-Purpose-Audience. (CPA)★ What’s a Good Idea?★ The 5 Facts of Fiction.The best approach for me has been to introduce kids to all of these strategies and then to encourage them to pick the ones that work best for whatever they’re trying to do. Ironically, the way I know I’ve been successful is when kids stop using them—but are still able to choose good topics and develop them logically and completely. To me, this signifies their transition from beginning writers, who didn’t know how to get started, into mature writers who can successfully select and develop an idea without having to pre-write—just like adults. Most adults don’t do a lot of pre-writing. Instead they do a lot of “pre-thinking.” For example, I often spend weeks thinking about something before I write a single word. Each year that I work with student writers, pre-writing becomes more important to me. I now encourage students at all grade levels to spend a lot of time on pre-writing. Increasing the amount of time spent on pre-writing, and using good pre-writing strategies such as those listed above, has done more to improve the quality of the writing I see than almost anything else.</div>	<div>★ DRAFTING</div> <div>Put it Down on Paper</div> <div>Drafting is where formal writing begins. Using pre-writing materials as inspiration, the writer writes. And writes. And writes some more. The goal is to get everything down on paper as quickly and as easily as possible.<p>The biggest problem kids encounter, of course, is writer’s block. I treat writer’s block just like any other problem writers have. I introduce kids to a variety of strategies and ask them to pick the ones that work best for them. Here’s what I tell them to try:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Use your pre-writing. Go back to your pre-writing and look for new material. Or, do some new pre-writing.★ Share. Share your writing and ask your audience if they have any questions or any thoughts about what you could do next.★ Re-read. Read your piece from the beginning. New ideas often occur to writers when they read over their entire piece.★ Request a conference. But only if the teacher is available.★ Work on something else. Put the piece aside and work on another piece for a while.It’s also helpful to get the kids in the habit of “setting up” their paper before they begin to draft. I usually ask kids to keep all of their drafts, so each time they write I want them to do the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Write on every other line. This makes revising and editing easier. Put a tiny “x” on every other line at the far left edge of the paper to remind yourself.★ Write on one side of the paper only. This makes reading easier.★ Number all your pages. This makes finding pages easier.★ Date each page. This makes it easier to keep track of many different revisions.</div>	<div>★ SHARING</div> <div>Get Some Advice</div> <div>For student writers, sharing is usually the most valuable and enjoyable stage in the writing process. There are three different ways to organize sharing, and each approach has its advantages and disadvantages:<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Whole class sharing. This is the most valuable approach for the writer, but it’s also the most time consuming for the class.★ Small group sharing. More time efficient, and each writer still gets a large enough audience to get good feedback, but it can be hard to manage.★ Partner sharing. Very efficient, but the feedback from a single audience member is often not very useful.Though the benefits of sharing are many, I focus on one particular goal. Whenever writers share their work, I want to make sure they get useful, constructive feedback so they know what they’re going to do next. When I facilitate whole class sharing, for example, I will often end each writer’s turn by asking them if they know what they’re going to do when they go back to their seat. If they don’t know, I keep them up in front until they figure something out. In this way, kids learn quickly that the purpose of sharing a draft is to get ideas for revision.<p>Here are three simple things I tell kids that have made a huge difference in my sharing:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Use the criteria. Respond using the language of the classroom criteria when possible.★ Questions only, please. If the writer is still working on an early draft, ask questions only.★ Ask “why” and “how” questions. This helps authors by challenging them to respond in more complex and interesting ways.I find that sharing is also very useful for figuring out which lessons I need to teach.</div>	<div>★ REVISING</div> <div>Take Another Look</div> <div>For me, the key to revision has been effective sharing. When kids get regular feedback from their peers, revision comes more easily.<p>For adult writers, a sense of purpose and audience provide the necessary motivation for revision, and I find that kids aren’t much different. Choice is also a significant factor: students are much more likely to revise pieces based on things they’ve chosen to write about than on teacher-selected prompts or other assignments. Teacher modeling helps also. When kids can see me up there struggling with my own writing right in front of them, it makes them feel like giving it a try themselves.<p>Revision is the point in the writing process where writers benefit most from good mini-lessons. As a guide for which lessons to teach, I use the classroom criteria. These are the areas I focus on:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Ideas. Main idea, supporting details, “showing” details, purpose, the unexpected.★ Organization. Beginnings, endings, sequencing, pacing, transitions.★ Voice. Audience emotions, audience needs, honesty, personality, control.★ Word Choice. Appropriate language, strong verbs, precise modifiers, memorable phrases, usage.★ Sentence Fluency. Sentence beginnings, sentence lengths, expressiveness, sound, construction.Sometimes, writer’s will get in the habit of ignoring the feedback they get from you or from their audience. When this happens repeatedly, I ask students to make a brief “revision plan” stating in writing the things they are planning to work on. I then ask them to conference with me on those things before going on to the editing stage.</p></div>	<div>★ EDITING</div> <div>Make Corrections</div> <div>Editing is such a complex and demanding task that I have found I need to tackle it from several vantage points. I lay the foundation with a variety of whole class activities including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Conventions reading. A daily choral reading activity where kids read not only the text but every convention as well.★ Conventions inquiry. Investigations in a variety of texts that help kids make useful generalizations.★ Expressive reading. Solo oral reading where students use conventions to guide them in their interpretations.★ Selected mini-lessons. I cover basic concepts like sentences, commas, dialog, and paragraphs.I base my teaching on research-based principles: 1) Publish more shorter pieces; 2) Focus on one convention at a time; 3) Work in the context of authentic student writing.<p>The bulk of my direct instruction is done one-on-one during editing conferences. As time consuming as this can be, the progress kids have made has been more than worth it.</p>I hold children to the same standard of correctness that I hold adults: all writers must do their best to make their writing as correct as it can be. I do not believe that a child’s writing must be perfect in order for it to be published—mine isn’t.Should teachers correct student work? I can’t tell you what to do, but I can tell you what I value: student initiative, independence, and my time. When I work with kids, they hold the red pen and do the editing. I make suggestions, I point out trouble spots, I answer questions, I offer advice, but in general I do not correct student work. And on those occasions when I do, I’m sitting in front of the student working in the context of authentic writing.</div>	<div>★ ASSESSING</div> <div>Reflect on the Work</div> <div>Encouraging writers to take some time to reflect on their work pays huge dividends to teacher and student alike. I use information gained from formal and informal assessments for student-teacher goal setting and for guiding my instruction. Here are some of the assessment approaches I’ve had good luck with:<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Formal criteria-based teacher assessment. Interesting and valuable, but very time consuming. I would do it only once or twice a year.★ Small group or whole class share session. This is more celebration than critique. If a writer is sharing published work, I ask kids to make positive comments only—unless the author asks for criticism.★ Student self-assessment. This is the most valuable assessment activity. It’s also time efficient. With a little training, kids can do it on their own using the classroom criteria.★ Student written reflection. Kids don’t like to do reflections—and I don’t blame them—but they can be very valuable for me and for their parents, so I request them from time to time.★ Formal peer assessment. This can be risky, so I don’t do it until I’ve seen a lot of evidence in sharing that kids can treat each other with kindness and respect.★ Parent written response. I love having parents write back to their kids. Parents of elementary kids will do it any time I ask. Parents of secondary kids often don’t bother. I hope that will change some day.The most important thing I’ve learned about assessment is to get the kids involved as fully as possible. When the kids take the lead in assessing their own abilities, learning increases dramatically.</div>	<div>★ PUBLISHING</div> <div>Polish for Presentation</div> <div>Preparing a piece of writing for publication pre-supposes that it will be published in some form. Helping kids find authentic publishing opportunities can be challenging, but it really makes a difference in the quality of their work. Here are some of the best ideas I’ve come across:<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Classroom newspapers. I have never seen kids work harder to polish their prose than they do when they’re publishing their own newspaper.★ Author pockets. Outside the classroom, kids post a “pocket,” complete with “About the Author” information, where they can display their published pieces for anyone to read.★ Web site. Classroom web sites are huge motivators, as are various other online venues like Amazon.com where kids can post their own book reviews.★ Outside school. Letters sent to real people—some of whom even write back—seem to be the best motivators. Contests are fun, too.★ Portfolio. In classrooms where portfolios are valued, kids seem to love getting pieces ready for them.I don’t worry about whether kids publish in manuscript or in cursive. I just tell them that the point of publishing is having someone read your work, so use the type of handwriting in which you write most neatly.I don’t have kids publish on the computer until they can touch type at least 15-20 words per minute. Until that point, kids type so slowly and with so many errors that their time on the computer is not time well spent. Kids who can’t touch type have to use the “hunt and peck” approach which reinforces bad habits that have to be unlearned later. I start teaching kids to type at the beginning of 3rd grade. By mid-year, many are publishing on the computer.</div>
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**“FULL”
VERSION**

The Writing Process Notebook



**FOR MORE
INFORMATION
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by Steve Peha

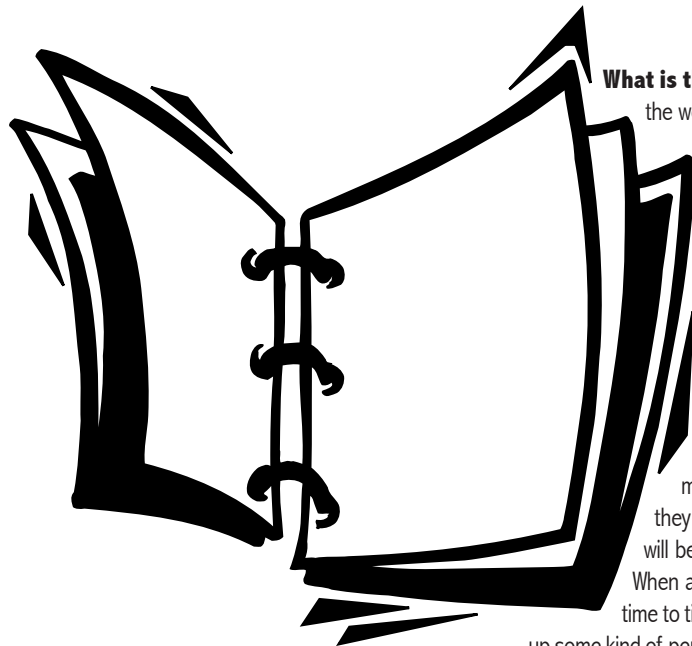


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is the way that makes sense
to you, your kids,
and your community.

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The Notebook

A Practical Way to Get Kids Organized For Writer's Workshop



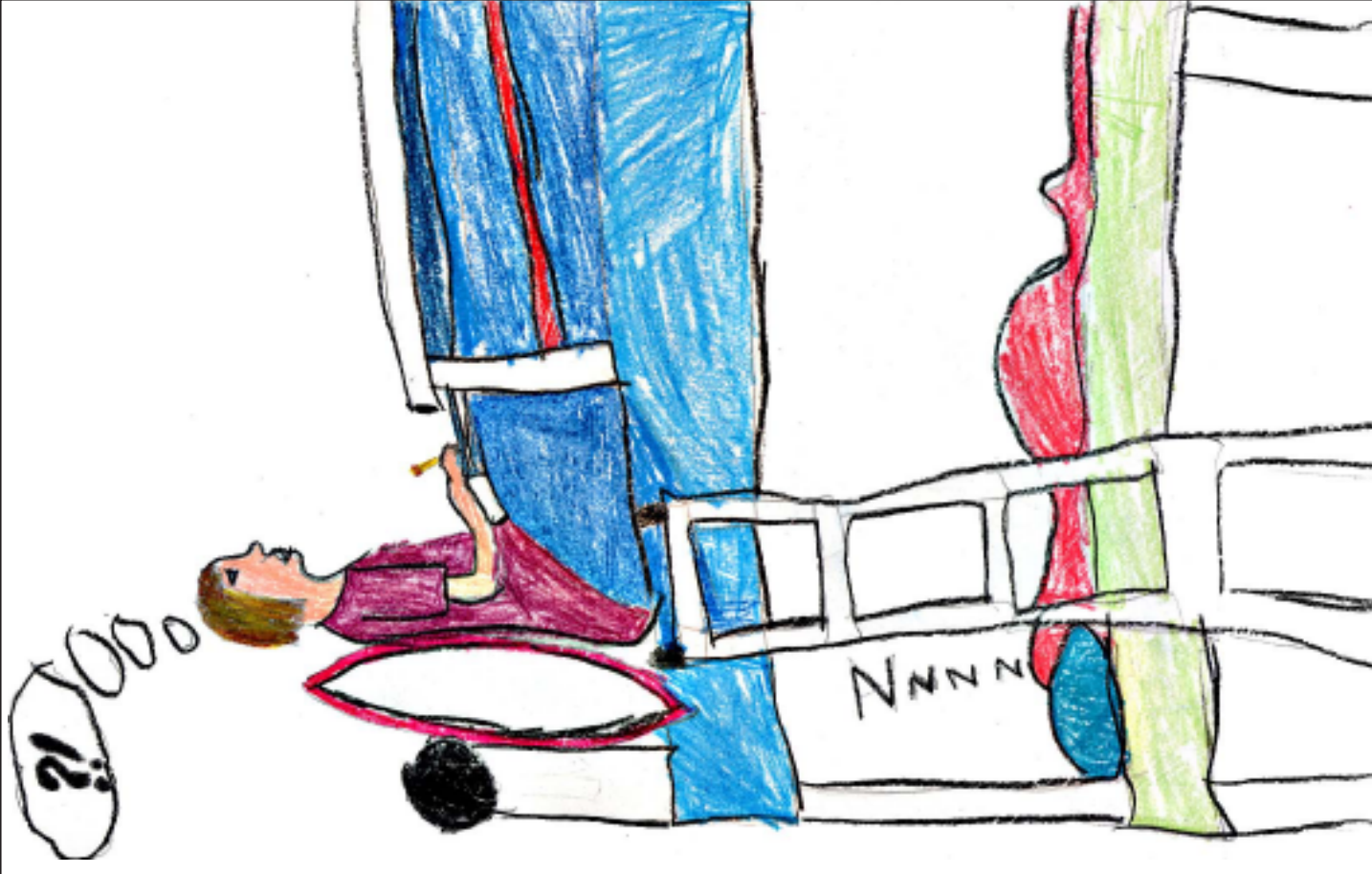
What is the Notebook? The notebook is a way for kids to keep track of all the work they generate in Writer's Workshop. One of the first problems teachers encounter when they begin using Writer's Workshop every day is that their kids create enormous amounts of writing. Kids can turn out 20-30 pages or more in just a few weeks. And before you know it, desks are bulging with loose papers that no one wants to throw away, but at the same time no one knows what to do with them either. If you don't have a way of helping the kids organize their own work, you end up doing it for them. And that's just not practical.

How Do I Use the Notebook? Each section of the notebook is tied to a particular section of the Writing Process. As students move pieces from one stage to the next, have them store the things they are working on in the appropriate section. All their pre-writing work will be in the Pre-writing section, all their drafts in Drafting, and so on. When a piece is finished, it can be saved in the Publishing section. From time to time, ask the kids to clean out their notebooks. You may want to set up some kind of permanent "archive" or classroom library to allow kids to save things throughout the year (ideally for portfolios), or you can just have kids take things home. Once a piece has gone through publishing, kids should feel free to throw out most of the preliminary materials they created, but try to encourage them not to throw away anything from Section 3: Responding or Section 7: Assessing. This is extremely valuable information that is well worth reviewing from time to time throughout the year. In addition to helping kids stay organized, this type of notebook format is ideal for showing to parents at conference time because it illustrates in one place all the activities you are doing in your writing program, and how each student is handling those activities. Remember, too, that students can use this notebook to organize all the writing you do in class, not just writing from Writer's Workshop.

Do I Have to Use This Notebook? Absolutely not. In fact, I would encourage teachers to introduce their own notebook format that is ideally suited to their students and their style of teaching. This is the notebook I would hand out to my kids. It is very much in my style. But if you think it would work for you, please use it. Among other things, it has a lot of useful information about the Writing Process built into it. And this material can easily be used as the basis for mini-lessons. To help you get started with creating your own notebook, I have also included a set of "blank" section covers with just the names of the stages of the Writing Process. In general, this type of notebook format can be used for kids of all ages, except possibly very small children. My feeling is that 2nd graders and perhaps even some 1st graders should be able to manage something like this. However, for many primary students, a simpler folder arrangement may be more effective. For the most part, these very young students are not going through the full Writing Process. They don't need seven sections in a three-ring binder to stay organized. Last but not least, you may want to consider the addition of an eighth section at the back that students can use to save handouts, keep log or journal entries, and store other miscellaneous materials that don't fit neatly into one of the seven main sections.

Through the Writing Process

with
Sonja Butler



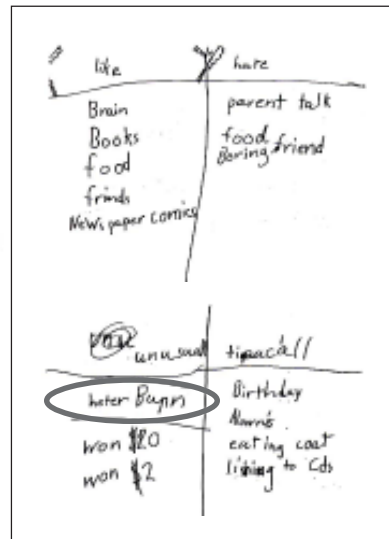
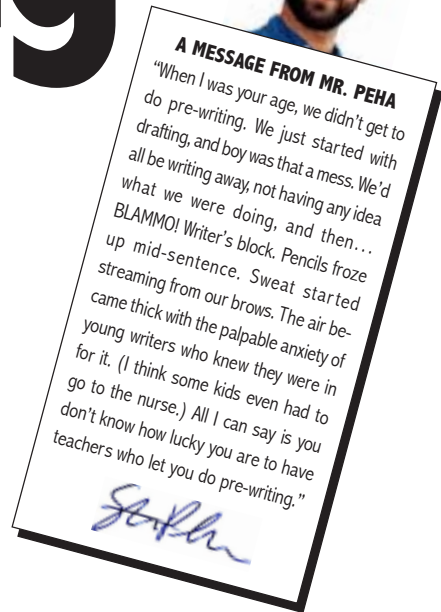
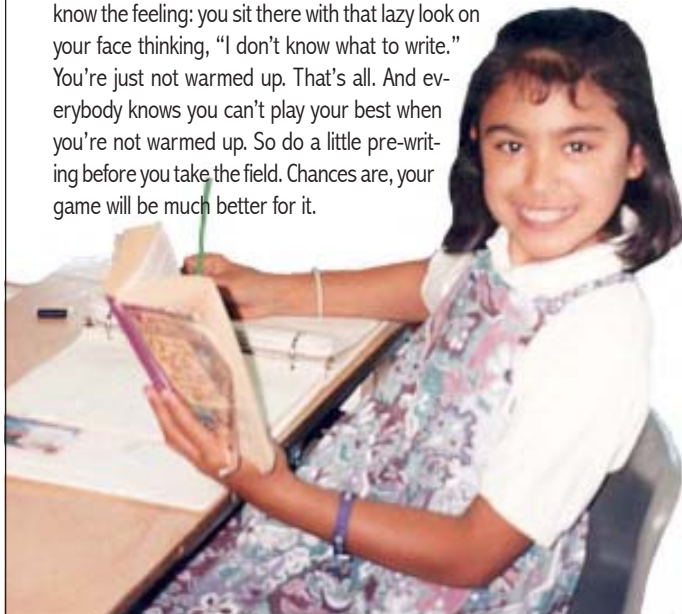
Pre-Writing

The Writing Process Stage One

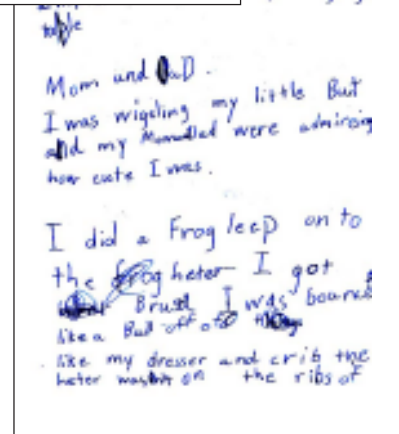
What is Pre-Writing? As its name implies, pre-writing is any writing you do before you start writing. Sound confusing? It's not. We all do a little bit of thinking before we write (yes, even you). So why not write some of that thinking down? Maybe you don't know exactly what you're going to write about. Maybe you don't know what you're going to write about at all. The fun of pre-writing is that it really doesn't matter. Pre-writing is a time that you can use to experiment, to jot down a few quick ideas, to try out something new without having to try very hard, to take a little time to gather your thoughts and choose a direction before you start drafting.

What Can I Do During Pre-Writing? You can do just about anything you want. You can draw. You can read (just like Alex down there in the picture). You can make notes. You can scribble random thoughts. You can make a web or a story map. You can do anything that will help you come up with good ideas for writing. It doesn't really matter what you do, as long as it involves turning on your brain and thinking about your topic. Then, just write down whatever pops into your noggin. As you begin to put ideas down on the page, see if you can organize them in some way. Take your time. There's no rush. Time spent pre-writing is time well spent.

Why is Pre-Writing Important? If you play sports or a musical instrument you know that it's always a good idea to warm up before you start to play. (Actually, if you're like most kids, you probably just ignore advice like this when silly adults like me start yackin' away like we think we're handing down some big secret that if you don't know all about it something awful will happen. But anyway...) That's kind of what pre-writing is. It's warm-up. It gets your mind loose and limber so that by the time you're ready to start drafting, you can push the pencil around the page without straining your brain too hard. You know the feeling: you sit there with that lazy look on your face thinking, "I don't know what to write." You're just not warmed up. That's all. And everybody knows you can't play your best when you're not warmed up. So do a little pre-writing before you take the field. Chances are, your game will be much better for it.



1 Pick a Topic



2 Make Some Notes

Choose Something to Write About

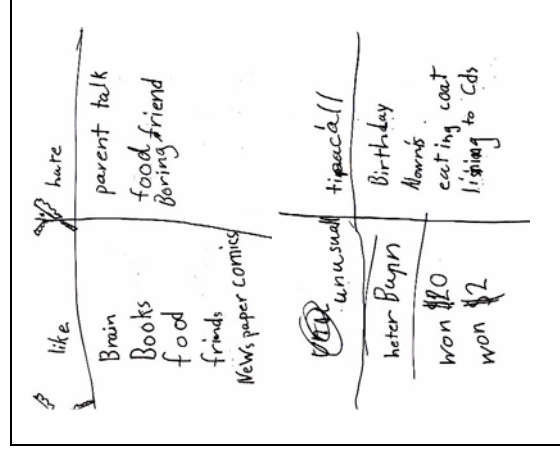
The first stage of *The Writing Process* is called Pre-Writing. “Pre” means “before”, and you already know what writing means. But what does “pre-writing” mean? Sounds kinda weird doesn’t it? How could you do any writing *before* you did any writing? Here you are, sharpened pencil at the ready, eager to crank out another 5000 words before lunch, and somebody says you’ve got to do this “pre” writing stuff before you can even get started. (As if you didn’t have enough to do already!) Well, you don’t absolutely have to do *any* pre-writing, but many writers find that their work comes much easier, and turns out much better, when they give it a try.

One of the things that pre-writing is particularly good for is helping you find something good to write about. Let’s face it: if you don’t have something good to write about, something you really *want* to write about, something you have *strong feelings* about, then you might as well put down your pencil right now and go to recess.

OK, come back here. I didn’t mean that literally. But I guess in a way, I did. People do their best writing when they’re writing about things they care about and things they know very well. Things we know very well often come from our life, the typical and unusual things that happen to us. Things we care about are often those things we really like and those things we really hate.

1 PRE-WRITING

- > Making lists of things to write about is one of the best pre-writing activities you can do.
- > Not only did Sonja find something good to write about, she has plenty of good topics for next time.
- > You can make other lists, too. Any list is better than none at all. Writing a fiction story? Make a list of the best titles you can think of, and go from there!



For her first pre-writing activity, Sonja made four lists: a list of things she liked, a list of things she hated, a list of some unusual things that have happened to her in her life, and a list of typical life experiences. Then she thought for a minute about which one to choose. Finally, she chose “heter burn” from her “unusual” list, but as we’ll soon find out, it wasn’t really the heater that caused the problem.

Teaching Tips

Choosing something to writing about is the most important pre-writing activity, so don’t take it lightly. In fact, the younger or less accomplished the writer, the more important topic selection becomes. Traditionally, teachers assigned topics. At the other end of the spectrum is the idea that students should write about anything they want. I’ve had the most success with a middle way: students select their own topics from within certain broad areas that I suggest.

Here are two basic principles about topic selection that I always give out to the students I work with:

- > Good writing comes from strong feelings. Write about the things you really care about.
- > Good writing comes from life experience. Write about what you know.

To this end, I have a list of lists I use to help kids on their way. They all take more or less the same form as the lists presented in this lesson. Here are some other lists that will encourage kids to pick topics that will help them grow as writers:

- > Things you regret, and things you are proud of.
- > Things that are easy and things that are hard.
- > Things you are good at and things you are not.
- > Things that are silly and things that are serious.
- > Things you are an expert in and things you would like to know more about.
- > The first time you ever did something and the last time you ever did something.

Of course, the best topics are those that show up on both sides of one of these lists—the complicated ideas that have both positive and negative aspects.

Help your students keep purpose and audience in mind, for these are the primary motivators that lead to the best and most valuable writing experiences. What do your kids want to say? And who do they want to say it to?

Students should select topics from the areas and genres which are most likely to help them improve as writers. Don’t worry too much if students write for weeks or even months about the same topics. They’ll move on when they’re ready. Kids should have choice but they may not yet know enough about themselves as writers and human beings to make good choices all the time. So guide them thoughtfully and “with a light touch.”

Make Some Notes

Another good thing to do before you actually get started writing is to make a few notes about your topic. If you chose to write about something you like or hate, jot down a few thoughts about why you feel the way you do. If you're writing about something from your life, put down a few things about how it all got started, what happened in the middle, and how it ended up. Who was there? How old were you? How did you feel?

This is very casual writing. You don't have to write in sentences or even in phrases, single words here and there will work just fine. The point of doing this is to jog your memory a little bit, to help you put down a few of the big ideas you want to be sure to talk about.

1 PRE-WRITING

► Making notes is a great way to plan out your piece. Try it!

I was 10 nense old.
at my old hobble on my changing
table

Mom and Dad.
I was wigeling my little But
all my Mom and Dad were admiring
how cute I was.

I did a Frog leap on to
the frog heter I got
like a Ball out of the
like my dresser and crib the
heter was on the ribs of

The heter.

My Mom and Dad were
trying to catch me
But they didn't.

My Mom and Dad had a single
with me until it was all
better

Sonja decided to write down a few simple thoughts about what happened to her. She quickly wrote down everything that took place from beginning to end. This gave her a general plan for how she was going to tell her story. This makes writing your first draft a lot easier.

She probably won't be copying these words down exactly, she's just using this pre-writing activity like "scratch paper," something rough and informal that she's probably going to throw away after she gets her first draft finished. But these thoughts will give her something to fall back on if she gets stuck and can't figure out what to write.

Notice that Sonja also drew a little picture at the end of the second page. That's OK, too. Anything you want to do that will help you get started on your piece is just fine.

Teaching Tips

I hated taking notes when I was in school because no one ever showed me how to use them. As such, notes were just one more thing I had to do that didn't have any value to me. The key to getting kids to take notes lies not in their taking but in their use. That's what I like about this little exercise. All kids are doing is writing down, in sentences or near-sentences, what they're going to write about. Later, they'll simply take these initial attempts, order them, and put them into a draft.

A related idea that works well for children who are not paragraphing effectively is called "Sentence Strips." Have your kids write out sentences on individual strips of paper. Then, have them sort the strips into groups of related ideas. Finally, have them put the strips in order within each group. Encourage them to create new strips as needed to fill in the blanks. Then put the piles into an order that makes sense.

I don't use webbing, mapping, or other types of more complicated graphic organizers. Here's why:

- Few, if any, professional writers use them or explicitly recommend them.
- I have seen no significant research indicating that these tools help kids write more effectively than simply making lists as I advocate here.
- For many kids, the organizer becomes an end in itself.
- The organizer often determines what kids do, not the other way around.
- I have never seen an explicit recommendation for their use by any of the leading teacher/researchers (Graves, Atwell, Calkins, Emig, Murray, Elbow, etc.).

I don't mean to be dogmatic about this at all. I would never tell a child they couldn't use an organizer. Just make sure you show them how to translate their "organized" work into actual writing. Model this process as often as possible.

And last but not least... avoid outlining. Once again, few professional writers use outlining, and prominent researchers rarely recommend it. Like graphic organizers, outlining is yet another pre-writing tool, but it's popularity is more the result of academic tradition than real world effectiveness.

Give mini-lessons on all these techniques. But make sure each lesson focuses not on the technique itself, but how the technique helps writers harvest the fruit of their pre-writing labors, package it up, and ship it off to market for hungry readers.

The Writing Process Stage Two



A MESSAGE FROM MR. PENN

"Writing is hard. Anybody who tells you it isn't is lying. But lots of things in life are hard, and we do them all the time because they're important; they make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. Writing is one of those things. People will tell you that if it isn't going well, take a break. But I say stick it out. If you can learn how to work through the rough spots, they won't be so rough in the future. Day by day, little by little, sentence by sentence, word by word... writing will get easier—but only if you learn to do it when it's hard."

Stephen

"Gentle"

get hurt is bad
not I, but even
as has I am
- wasn't hurt so
kind well if
you wouldn't
this would you
every had a find
p. here.

The End

2 Don't Stop

What Makes Drafting Hard? Sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, it's not. You see, a lot of us don't like to drive fast. We putz around the track at 10 miles an hour, and then we wonder why we never get anywhere. But hey, going fast is scary, right? And then there's folks who spend most of their lives with their foot on the break pedal. That's self-consciousness—the feeling that what you're writing is stupid, or that it doesn't make any sense, or that it will somehow embarrass you. So, drafting isn't really about doing something, it's about not doing something else. It's about not psyching yourself out, not making yourself afraid, not worrying about spinning out in the third turn and losing the race, because here's the deal: you can't crash. That's right. Drafting is like playing a race car video game with an endless supply of quarters. If you end up in a ditch with nothing to write about, just pop in another coin, pick up your pencil, and start driving again on some other part of your topic.

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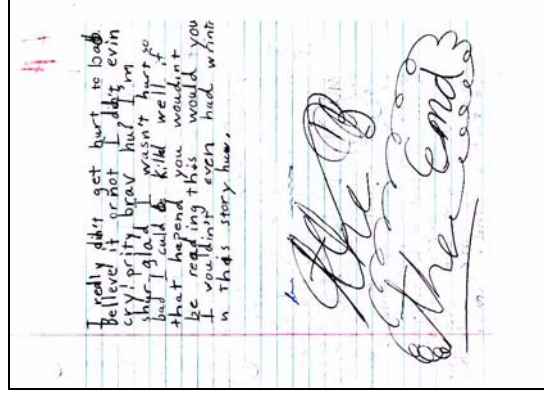
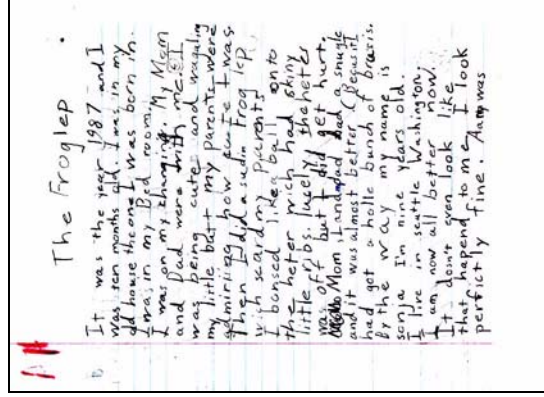
Start Drafting

As soon as you've decided what to write about, and sketched out a few thoughts, just grab a pencil and go to it. Just start writing. And don't stop until you get to the end. Use the notes you created during pre-writing for inspiration, but feel free to change things here and there if you're so inclined. Your pre-writing materials are merely meant to guide you as you wend your way through this very early stage of creating a piece of writing.

That's an important thing to keep in mind: it's early. You're only drafting. You've still got a long way to go—many opportunities to change what you've written, to review and revise, to add and subtract, to modify and make corrections. Do your best, but don't get distressed. This is not your final copy, it's merely the first of what will probably be many attempts to get things "just right." And with each attempt you make, you'll get a little closer to your goal of creating a piece of writing that says exactly what you want it to say exactly the way you want to say it.

DRAFTING

► *Just start writing, and don't stop until you get to the end!*



You can see that Sonja's gotten off to a good start. In fact, she's written down her entire story from beginning to end. She's completed her first draft. Notice, too, that she didn't just copy down her pre-writing notes. Some of her pre-writing is in her draft, but she's added some new things, too.

One thing you might think about that Sonja did not do is this: when you are drafting, instead of writing on every line, try to write on every other line. This will make it easier for you to modify your work later on. (And besides, it makes you feel like you're writing twice as much!)

Can you really teach drafting? Is there anything to teach? Probably not in the technical sense that we usually think of, but there is much we can do, it seems to me, to help kids at this stage—and much we should be doing, too.

If you think about it, writers are almost always drafting. Any time you write a sentence or a phrase for the first time, you're drafting. Even when you're revising, you're often drafting.

I have come to think of drafting as the copying of words in the writer's head onto the page. So, one way we might help kids get started is to validate this idea of just writing what's on your mind. So-called "free writing," if done for short periods of time and on a regular basis, is probably the best way to get kids to become familiar with this simple but elusive transaction.

What surprises me is not that so many kids can't do this, but that so many don't think it's OK. To get kids comfortable with this, I do a formal mini-lesson in which I simply write as fast as I can in front of them while at the same time speaking each word as I write it. It's very funny: I make a lot of mistakes, my handwriting is bad, and rarely does what I write make much sense. But I do get some pearls here and there, and I always show kids how I can go back to edit and revise the rough remarks I've scribbled down during drafting. I think modeling is the key here because it is self-consciousness, more than any lack of ability or knowledge, that makes drafting problematic.

The ability of a group of students to draft is often indicative of their past exposure to writing as a thinking tool. Children should be writing all day long, many times each day, often for just a few minutes here and there. It is the regularity of these “quick write” sessions (a note in a reading log, a journal entry, a note to the teacher, a “to do” list, a sign, a response, a question, a memory, a reminder, a description, etc.) that helps kids loosen up. The best way to improve drafting is to make sure your kids are engaged in casual writing throughout the day.

Finally, another thing we can do is to watch our use of traditional terminology like “rough draft” or “first draft” or “final draft” which can make the process of drafting seem much more formal than it really is, and hence more intimidating. In fact, if I had my way, I’d probably just abolish the term “drafting” altogether in favor of a less specific term: “writing.” But it is a useful term as long as we are careful not to attach to it any extra formality, or the sense that children often get that somehow drafting is a performance that has to be executed in a certain way and to a certain arbitrary standard.

The Writing Process

Stage Three

3

What is Sharing? Sharing means just what it says: sharing your work with other people and getting some feedback about how you're doing. Most writers in a writer's workshop get response from other writers when they share their work in front of the whole group. Your piece doesn't have to be finished for you to share it. In fact, it's probably better for you to share it several times long before it's done, so you have a chance to make changes based on the comments you receive. One thing that helps is to focus your audience on something in particular that you would like them to respond to. Try this: "My piece is called. . . . I'd like you to listen for . . . , and tell me what you think about it."

A MESSAGE FROM MR. PEHA

A MESSAGE FROM MR. PENN

"Writing is a lonely business. You think up something to write about: alone. You make notes: alone. You draft: alone. But in the end, the experience you've created on the page begs to be shared with others. So why not share your work along the way? Ask your teacher, your parents, your friends, your enemies—ask anyone to read your work and tell you what they think. You don't have to take their advice, but it can't hurt to consider it. And do the same for other writers when you can."

[Signature]

1 Use Your Criteria

[illegible]

What Makes This Stage Hard? There are two troublesome things about the sharing stage: getting responses and giving them. Standing up in front of the group and sharing your writing takes guts. You're afraid people will laugh at you or that they won't like your writing. Maybe you don't read very well. Or maybe you just don't like what you've written. The only way to conquer your fears is get up there in front of everyone and face them. Each time you do it, you'll begin to feel more comfortable. After a while, sharing will be fun and you'll want to do it all the time. On the other hand, commenting on someone else's writing can also be difficult. Telling another writer that you like or hate their piece, while possibly an honest reaction, really isn't very helpful. The writer needs to know why you feel the way you do and what specific parts of the writing make you feel that way. It's important to be both honest and respectful of other writer's feelings. And this is a balancing act that takes time to perfect and a

great deal of maturity. One tip for making insightful and appropriate comments is to rely on the language of the Six Traits criteria. Phrasing your reactions in these terms virtually guarantees that any comments you make will always be positive and constructive.

2 Get Other Opinions



3 Think it Over

And see what happens. Most writers are pleasantly surprised by how much fun it is to present their work to others. When it comes to responding to others, try this: as you listen to the writing being read make a mental note of what you like and what you don't like before you make a comment, jot down one or two. Try to answer these

Hmm...

Get Some Feedback

You've cranked out a draft, now what? Are you finished? Your piece probably doesn't look very finished. It probably looks a bit like Sonja's—a little messy with a few crossouts here and there, a few false starts perhaps, a few tentative ramblings, maybe even some doodling in the margins. So where do you go from here? How do you figure out what to do next? How can you determine which path to take to make your piece the very best it can be?

When you don't know which way to go, it's always a good idea to ask for directions. And the first person to ask is yourself. Start by reading what you've written from beginning to end without stopping, and then ask yourself... Hmmm... What should you ask yourself?

This is where the Six Traits criteria come in handy. Looking at the criteria is a little like reading the answers to a test before you take it. These are the things your writing needs to be effective. Do you have them?

3 SELF-ASSESS

► Use the Six Traits criteria to find out how to improve your piece.

Student-Friendly Criteria for the Elementary Grades			
Name <u>Sonja</u>	Paper <u>The Fog Lep</u>	Date <u>10-04-96</u>	
Instructions: (1) Read the paper all the way through. (2) Read each criteria item and enter "Y" for "yes," "N" for "no," "S" for "sort of." (3) Mark your total score in the space provided.			
IDEAS <i>Interesting Things to Say</i> Y It all makes sense. Y The writer knows this topic well. S The writer has included interesting details not everyone would think of. Y The paper has a purpose. Y Once you start reading, you won't want to stop.	ORGANIZATION <i>The Way It Goes Together</i> S It starts out with a bang! S Everything ties together well. Y It builds to the good parts. Y You can follow it easily. Y At the end it feels finished and makes you think.	VOICE <i>Sounds Like You Talking</i> Y It sounds like a real person wrote it. Y You can tell the writer cares about this topic. Y This is what the writer really thinks. Y The writer wants you to read this and feel something. Y You can tell that the writer was thinking about the audience.	WORD CHOICE <i>The Best Words For Your Ideas</i> S This is the best way to say this. Y The writer's words make pictures in your mind. S The writer uses words that are new ways to say everyday things. Y The writer's words are powerful; the writer's nouns and adjectives are specific and precise. Y Some of the words linger in your mind after you read them.
SENTENCE FLUENCY <i>The Way It Sounds When You Read It Out Loud</i> S The writer's sentences begin in different ways. S Some sentences are long, some are short. S It sounds good as you read it. Y The writer's sentences have power and punch. Y The writing flows easily from sentence to sentence.			
CONVENTIONS <i>Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar, Capitalize, Etc.</i> Y The writer uses capitals correctly. Y Periods, commas, exclamation marks, and quotation marks are in the right places. Y Almost every word is spelled correctly. Y The writer indented each paragraph. S The writer's spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization make the paper easy to read and understand.			
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Of course, it's also a good idea to talk to other people, too, especially people who might be part of your audience. Ask your friends what they think. Get some comments from your teacher or another adult at school. Ask your parents to read it and give you their opinion.

Teaching Tips

Response can take many forms. I have featured in this lesson the idea of using the Six Traits criteria as a means self-assessment and revision planning, but that's hardly the only source of inspiration writers should seek.

Your regular daily sharing is the first place writers will get feedback. Don't underestimate the power of peer response. We are all influenced more by our peers than our superiors, and young writers are no exception. If you want your students to start solving certain problems, use your sharing time for this purpose. Move the discussion gently toward your areas of concern, and then back off and let the kids take it from there.

Beyond large group sharing, you have your mini-conferences, peer conferences, conferences with other adults, and especially with parents. Ask parents to respond formally in writing to their children's work. Show them the criteria for Six Traits, and then ask them to work that vocabulary into their responses whenever appropriate.

But getting feedback is only part of the deal. It's what a writer does with it that counts. Yes, that's revising, but the seeds of successful revision are sewn during the responding stage—and that's why it needs to be a formal stage of the process. I often ask kids to write down the more important responses they get. You can use a two-column format so kids can recognize what's working and what still needs work. Then, as they revise, encourage them to go back to this list from time to time. I like to call it a "revision plan," and though that's rather formal, you may from time to time want to require the creation of such a plan before students move ahead.

Using the Six Traits criteria, in a formal way as I have demonstrated in this lesson, is probably the best way to introduce students to independent self-assessment. I have kids fill out a lot of these. In fact, I have them look at the criteria each time they think they are finished. I don't make them address every issue, just the one's they think are important. But I have noticed that the mere repetition of this ritual has the effect of making students much more aware of their own writing. As Donald Graves has pointed out, we spend a lot of time teaching kids to read the writing of others, but virtually no time teaching them to read their own. That's what response is all about. It's like getting different "reads" on your own material so you can come to read it better yourself. The Six Traits criteria act like a guide. They don't tell the writer *what* to think, they tell the writer *how* to think about the writing they are reading.

Revising

The Writing Process
Stage Four

4

A MESSAGE FROM MR. PEHA

"Finally, after writing professionally for almost 10 years, I am coming to understand the value of revision. I used to hate it. I would crank out a magazine article or a book chapter in a day or two and never look back. But now, when I do look back, I see things I could have improved had I taken the time to consider my writing from my reader's point of view. I now spend weeks or even months on single pieces, revising my writing again and again—and because of this I feel I am finally learning to write well."

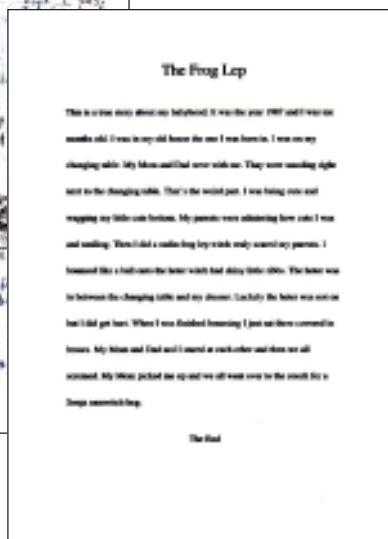
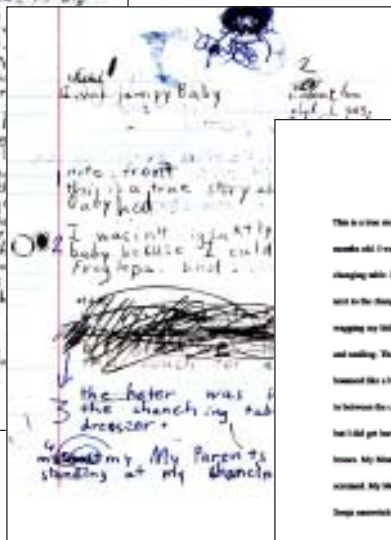
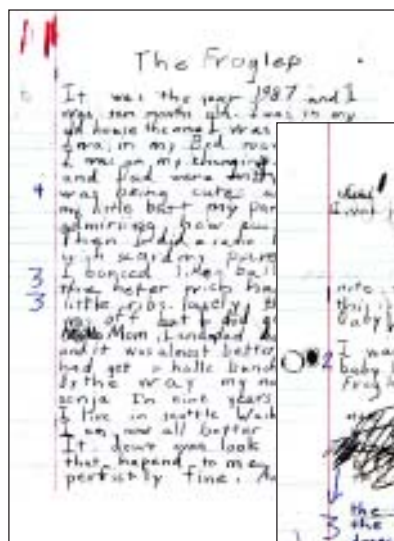
Steve Peha

What is Revising? The word "revision" literally means "to see again." This is what revising is all about. Having received comments about your piece during the Responding stage, you can better see your writing now from the reader's point of view. That's the key. Up to this point, you've probably been more concerned about yourself—what you wanted to say, how you felt about it, things you want to include. But now it's time to shift your thinking just a bit and really start considering your audience. It's time to start asking yourself, "How can I say what I want to say in a way that will make my readers understand how I feel and maybe make them feel that way, too?"

What Makes Revising Hard? Revising is hard because it involves four distinctly different things you often have to do all at the same time: [1] Adding things; [2] Moving things; [3] Cutting things; and [4] Leaving things alone. You may read over a sentence, decide to add a few words here and there, realize that you need to move things around, then cut some words that don't belong, and all the while you're thinking about what you can leave alone just the way it was. And you have to do all this as both writer and reader. As a writer, you have to make the changes you think your readers will appreciate, but then you have to switch over to the other side and try to experience those changes as your readers will. This is an impossible task. You can't get it right, you can only come close. This is why writers revise their work so much. Revision isn't something you do just once. Some writers revise parts of their work 5, 10, 15 times or more; they revise until they think they've gotten it just right.

What Should I Do? Hmm... that's a very good question. There's no one right answer because there's no one right way to revise. The important thing to recognize is

how important revising is. It is the most important stage in the Writing Process. It is where you should be spending most of your time because it will help you more than anything else to improve. Revising is also the most difficult stage in the Writing Process, so be patient with yourself. Don't expect to succeed right away. Nothing will test your patience and courage as a writer more than facing up to the task of revising your own writing, but there really is no other part of writing that is more rewarding.



1 Plan Your Changes

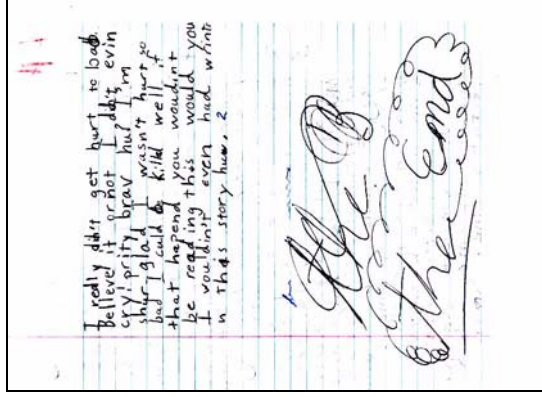
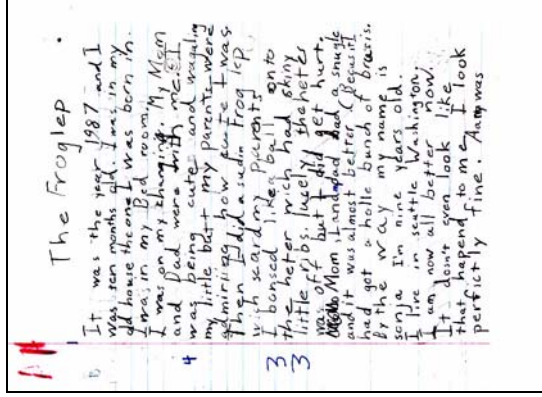
2 Make Your Changes

4 Repeat Until It's Just Right

3 Produce a New Revision

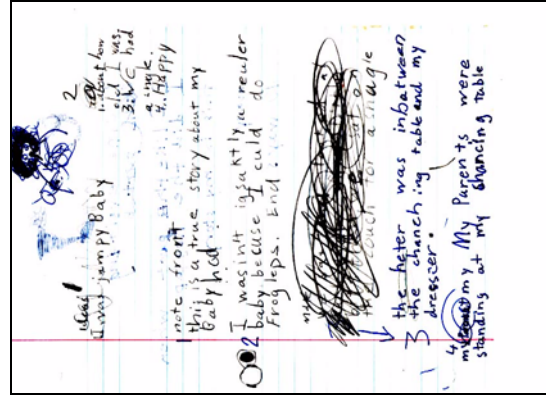
Plan Your Revisions

Arrmed with ample information about how to improve your piece, you're ready to revise. There are many different ways to revise your writing. Every writer has a different approach. Take a look at how Sonja did it. After getting some feedback on her draft, she decided to add a few things. She marked the places where she wanted to add new material by putting a number in the margin to the left of the line where the new information would go. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, she wrote out the sentences she wanted to add, and numbered them accordingly.



4 REVISING

> There are many ways to revise your writing. Try a few different things and then pick the ones that work best for you. Develop your own revising system, something you can count on to produce the results you want.



Teaching Tips

Revision is the hardest part of writing, but that is just as it should be because revision is also the most important part. Revision is where writers improve their writing, so if your students don't spend significant time revising, it is unlikely they will make significant improvement.

Revision is tough because it is really two tasks in one. The first task is the one we usually think about, it's the aesthetic task: what needs revising, what words need to be added, moved, or cut to make the piece better. The second task is the mechanical task: given the changes that need to be made, how does a writer actually enter those changes into the piece? I'll start with aesthetic issues first, since without those there wouldn't be any mechanics to worry about.

Writers have four choices when revising: [1] add something new; [2] move something around; [3] cut something out; and [4] leave something alone. I throw the fourth one in because I think it's important to help kids realize that deciding not to revise something is a significant act fraught with implications that needs to be considered just as carefully as anything else.

Now, here's the tough part: the typical type of revision a writer does involves all four of these activities simultaneously. You see something you want to change, you cut some of it out, you leave some of it behind, you add something new, and then you push things around to make it all fit—tough work for an 8-year old. So what do you do?

Start with adding. That's the easiest. Show kids how to add simple things (typically details) that will improve their piece. Introduce them to simple additions of an entire sentence, paragraph, or section. Treat these "revisions" essentially as mini-drafts to be inserted into an existing piece.

Next, think about moving. Are things in the best order? What if this part came first and that part next? Moving is easy. There's really no writing involved. It's more an exercise in reading, and in thinking about how a piece will be read and enjoyed by its audience.

Then cut. Tread lightly on this activity at first. Cutting is hard. Having struggled to squeeze several sentences out of their pencils and onto the page, few writers of any age or level of experience, relish the thought of throwing any of it away.

The most important thing to remember is that all changes should be motivated by the needs of the audience and the purpose of the piece. Without audience or purpose, revision has little meaning.

Write Out Your Revisions

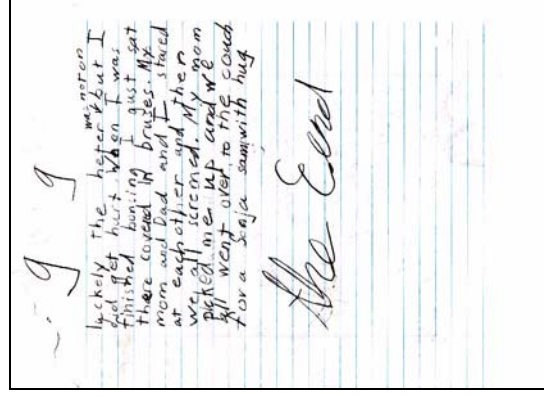
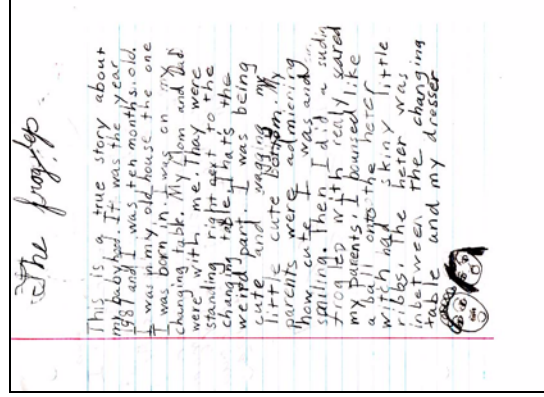
After making a few revisions, write them out and read everything over again so you can see how your changes fit in with what you already had. Sometimes, ideas that look good on a separate page or scrawled into the margins and in between the lines, don't sound so good in the context of the entire piece.

The key here is patience. The first time you make changes may not be the last. In fact, most writers find themselves revising constantly. Why? Because revision is the most important thing a writer can do. Time spent in revision turns bad writing into good writing, and good writing into great writing.

How many times should you revise a piece of writing? As many as you want to. You can keep making changes forever (or until your teacher tells you to turn it in, whichever comes first). Every time you finish a revision, get some feedback. Look at your Six Traits criteria again, talk to your friends, teachers, and parents. You don't have to take the advice your audience gives you, but it never hurts to listen to it.

4 REVISING

► Each time you make substantial revisions, write them out.



You can see that Sonja made the revisions she had planned on. She added the new sentences she had written, and copied the whole piece out again. But wait a minute. Her piece looks like it's just about as long as it was before. How could she have added so much new material—about 10 or 12 lines—and not made her piece any longer? She must have taken something out? She must have decided, after reading it over one more time, that some part didn't fit anymore. Apparently, after her first revision, she still had more revising to do. Can you tell what she took out? Why do you think she decided to make this particular revision?

Now, let's look at the mechanical issues. Don't take this lightly. It's actually just as hard or harder for young writers to manage the mechanics of revision as it is to decide what and how to revise.

Managing additions. Many of the little things writers need to add can just be written in the blank lines students leave between each line when they draft. But wait a minute. Skipping every other line is not something all of us do. In fact, most kids don't do it unless they are explicitly told to do so. Here's how I handle it: I don't tell kids to skip lines when they write. I wait until they need to revise and then I make them aware of how much easier it would be if they had some space to work with.

With all aspects of instruction, it's the rationale that's most important, so I think kids should come to the rationale in a natural way, rather than having it imposed from outside. Yes, it would be great if all of us skipped a line when we drafted, but very few of us do. It simply isn't natural. So if we want kids to learn how to do it, we need to make sure they understand why first.

For larger additions, have the kids mark where they think they want them to go with a number or a symbol, and then just write the new material on a separate piece of paper. There's no best way to do this, and ultimately each kid will have to come up with their own process. So make it fun. Ask the kids to invent ways of doing it. Try them out as a class and see which ones work best. And don't forget: model everything!

Managing moves. Moving text without a computer is hard work. Once again, anything that helps is just fine. I've had kids cut their papers into pieces and re-assemble them when necessary. As with adding, encourage kids to develop their own approaches and systems. Share ideas with the class. Model.

Managing cuts. Fortunately, the mechanics of cutting is as easy as the aesthetics of cutting is hard. After all, how many kids do you have who can't slash their pencil through a line of text? Here's a bit of caution, however: discourage kids from erasing text or blacking it out so thoroughly that it cannot be read or—and this is the important part—retrieved when the author wants it back later. A light, thin horizontal line through the vertical center of a word works just fine.

The way to get kids doing these things is to model them in your own writing during mini-lessons. Have at least one mini-lesson early in the year on the mechanical operations associated with each type of revision. Then, periodically, ask kids to explain the techniques they use when revising.

Make a Clean Copy

If you're like me, your handwriting probably isn't as neat as it could be. OK, I'll admit it: my handwriting is awful. So, you're probably not like me. You're probably a lot neater. Even so, revising can be a very messy business. So before you head off to the editing stage, you may want to make a clean copy that includes all the revisions you have made.

Do you have to use a computer for this? Not at all. Computers can be helpful, especially at this stage of the writing process, but they are not necessary. The goal here is just to get a nice clean copy of your work, so you can begin to make the tiny corrections most writers need to make before they publish their work. And most writers—even writers with abominable handwriting like me—can copy out their own work quickly and cleanly without much effort.

And that's the key: effort. Writing is hard enough as it is, you certainly don't want to make it any harder on yourself. If you haven't learned to type—and I mean "touch type" with hands on the home row (no peaking) at least 15-20 words per minute—don't mess with a computer. You'll take much too much time, and you'll probably create many typing errors that will only make editing harder.

4

REVISING

► *Whether you type it up or just write it out neatly, having a clean copy with all your revisions makes editing a lot easier.*

The Frog Leap

This is a true story about my childhood. It was the year 1987 and I was ten months old. I was in my old house the one I was born in. I was on my changing table. My Mom and Dad were with me. They were standing right next to the changing table. That's the weird part. I was being coddled and wagging my little feet behind me. My parents were admiring how cute I was and smiling. Then I did a sudden frog leap which really scared my parents. I bounced like a ball onto the heater which had slinky little ribs. The heater was in between the changing table and my dresser. Luckily the heater was on but I did get hurt. When I was finished bouncing I just sat there covered in bruises. My Mom and Dad and I stared at each other and then we all screamed. My Mom picked me up and we all went over to the couch for a Sonja sandwich hug.

The End

Cautions about computer use aside, you can see that Sonja has typed up her piece. Sonja is now in the 4th grade and has had some good typing lessons. She also has a computer at home and has been putting in lots of practice. She probably could have written it out faster by hand, but she's been working at the computer for several months now and is fairly comfortable with it.

Teaching Tips

Ever stay at a hotel where they have those cute little bottles of shampoo? They always have the same silly instructions on them: "Lather. Rinse. Repeat." Ever wonder why people don't just stand in the shower all day in a never-ending cycle of mindless hair washing?

How do you know when revision is over? How do you know when your hair is clean? Well, it just feels clean. It's the same thing with revision. When it feels done, it's done. For very young or less motivated writers, revision is over when they say it is. For truly mature writers, revision is a process that never ends. Most of us are somewhere in the middle. Don't push too hard, especially at first. I would never force any writer to revise. Revision is too important to risk making writers hate it.

Bring kids gradually into regular revision by using your sharing time, the Six Traits criteria, gentle coaching, and the natural feelings all kids have to want to make things better. And don't forget about audience and purpose—it is only through these two fundamental issues that kids develop a sense of why revising is important.

So, how should revision end? I think revision should end at a point that leaves you in the best shape to edit. Ideally that means writers should have a clean copy to work from—preferably double spaced. For many writers, especially the little ones, this may present a problem. Copying is time consuming and laborious. True enough. But the time it takes is often time well spent and the labor involved is also quite worthwhile. If, for example, you're a teacher who teaches handwriting formally, what better opportunity could there be for effective practice? And even if you don't teach handwriting as an isolated skill, copying work over is still a great way to practice. Ideally, you'd like each student to come out of the revising stage with a clean copy of their piece. Is a computer necessary for this? Not at all. Is it helpful? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. When should kids be using it? Probably not until 3rd or 4th grade, and certainly not until they've learned to touch type a little. Does using a computer make editing easier? Yes, but only to the extent that the student can type. If a student can't touch type 15-20 words per minute with reasonable accuracy, working at a computer will be slower than working by hand. And the student will be likely to introduce more errors than they correct. Is it unwise to ask students to re-copy their work from time to time during the Writing Process? No. Repetition is the essence of craft.

Editing

The Writing Process
Stage Five

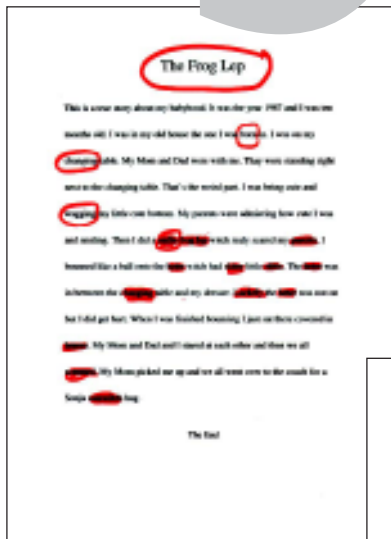
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What is Editing? Editing means many things to many people. But here it means only one thing: taking care of any problems you have with writing conventions like spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage. You can make minor changes to the content of your piece—a word here, a phrase there—but if you want to make bigger changes, go back to the Revising stage.

What Makes Editing Hard? Editing is hard because there a lot of things you need to know in order to do it well—more things than you can learn in any one year of school. To edit for spelling you have to know many words and be able to use a dictionary. To edit for punctuation you have to understand how to use every type of punctuation your writing needs.



What Should I Do? Edit the things you know how to edit. Then, ask someone else to help you with the rest. Watch what they do so you can do it on your own next time. Ask questions if you don't understand something. That's the only way to learn.

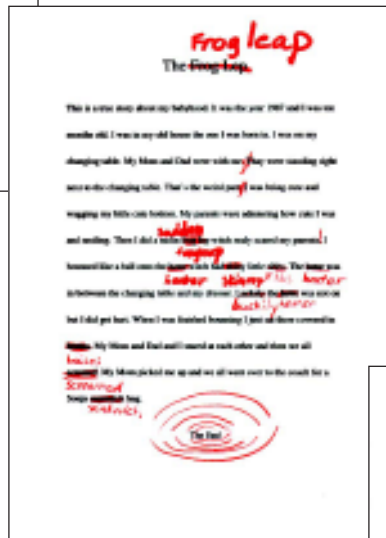


1 Find Errors

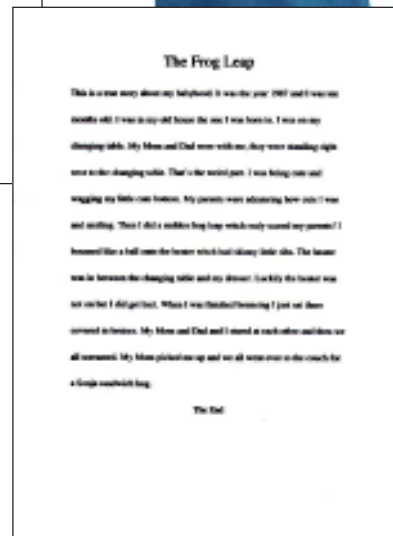


A MESSAGE FROM MR. PEHA

"I don't like editing one bit. It is tedious, it is boring, and worst of all I'm not very good at it. But I do it because I want people to know that I care enough about what I write to be as sure as I can be that it is correct. I know that if I don't spell correctly, or use proper punctuation, or write legibly, or use words in ways that my readers understand, my writing may not be very effective. Editing is hard. I am sure that I will never master it completely. But over time, and with much effort, I am getting better at it."



2 Make Corrections



3 Produce Clean Copy

Make Corrections; Have Someone Proofread

Once you've figured out what needs to be fixed you've got to do it. This is one task where a computer can be helpful. If you're not working on a computer, you may have to recopy your piece in order to fix the problems you have discovered. But even if you're working by hand, you can still come up with efficient ways to get your writing edited.

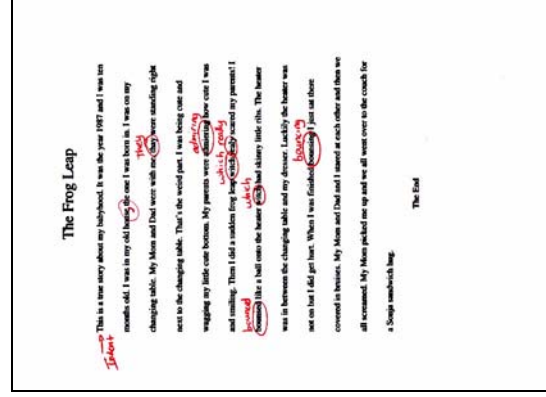
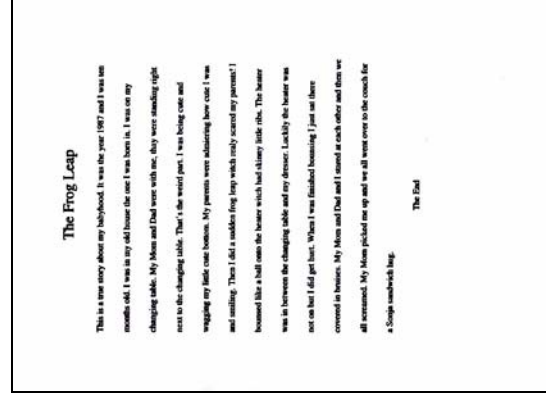
But there's a funny thing about editing that most people don't like to mention to students. Your teachers will tell you (and I will, too) that you should learn how to edit your own writing. After all, most of the time there isn't going to be anyone else around to do it. But the truth is, authors make the worst editors of their own work. That's why professional writers have other people to do a lot of their editing for them. You see, editing is all about fixing problems so people can understand what you write. But you already understand what you've written—you're not likely to have problems reading it—so you're not as likely to come across problems that need to be fixed.

Well, if the best professional writers in the world have editors, why shouldn't you get one or two? As soon as you've done as much editing as you can, ask someone else to proofread your work to see if they can find any problems that need correcting. You can ask other writers in your class, your teacher, or other adults in the room, or even your parents. Just ask them to please proofread your piece for correct conventions.

5

EDITING

► Do as much editing as you can, then ask someone else for help.



Of course, some people might have suggestions that you don't agree with. As with any other type of advice, you are free to accept or to ignore it. You alone, as the author of the piece, bare the ultimate responsibility for its content and its correctness.

Teaching Tips

"When should I correct a student's writing?"

Since correction is the traditional foundation of our educational system, it's only natural that this question comes up as much as it does. Many people feel that if students are not corrected, they will not learn. On the other hand, most adults are aware of the dangers of constant correction. To sort this out, it is important to remember that the source of our quandary is an emotional reaction—on the part of well-meaning adults who care deeply about kids—and not a logical one. One has only to consider how children learn to walk and to talk to realize that correction is not a requisite for mastering complex skills (modeling, criteria, scaffolding, and encouragement are the keys). Best then to separate past problems from current practice and break the bad habits we have acquired.

"So when should I correct a student's writing?" Whenever a student asks you for appropriate help in an appropriate way. What's appropriate? Here are some helpful guidelines.

Help kids when:

- they have already tried to fix something but can't.
- they have not yet been introduced to something or have obviously forgotten it.
- something relatively incidental is keeping them from making more important progress in another area.

Whenever possible:

- ask the child what type of error they would like you to look for, and only correct that type of error.
- correct the work in the child's presence.
- offer rationale for your corrections.
- emphasize the connection between correction and communication—that you are making corrections to make the child's writing easier to read.

Certain traditional practices have limited value and are probably not a good use of your time:

- DO NOT take papers home to correct them.
- DO NOT make marks on final published pieces. Use post-it notes or a coversheet.
- DO NOT correct kids publicly in front of the class.
- DO NOT set up a grading scheme for any aspect of your teaching that tracks the number of errors students make (or the number of items they get right) and equates that number with achievement.

Publishing

The Writing Process Stage Six

A MESSAGE FROM MR. PEHA

"Publishing is cool. There's so much you can do to make your piece inviting to a reader. I have learned about publishing from looking closely at the published writing I enjoy. Look at your favorite books. Don't just read them, look at them. Take a look at newspapers, magazines, TV commercials, the Internet—every kind of print. And don't worry too much about whether you're using a computer or not. You don't need a computer to make things look cool. In fact, most times, things done by hand look better."

Steve Peha

What is Publishing? The word "publish" might remind you of another word you know. That would be "public" because that's what publishing is all about: preparing a piece of writing so that it can be read, understood, and enjoyed by the public. Who's the public? Well, technically, it's anybody. But practically, it's the people in your class, your teacher, and anybody else you decide to show your writing to. Of course, if you send off a piece to a newspaper or magazine, things are a little different. But the main idea is that the Publishing stage is your chance to prepare your writing in a way that will best reach your audience.

Do I Have to Publish My Piece? Absolutely not. No writer ever has to publish something they don't want to. However, there are many times that people ask us to write things, and when they do, unless we feel that they are asking us to do something that is wrong or unfair, we need to do our best to honor their request. Publishing can be a very satisfying part of writing. It's fun to see your work all dressed up in a cool book with a snazzy cover. But sometimes you don't feel like publishing a certain piece, and that's just fine.

What Should I Do? Just about anything goes as long as it helps bring your writing to more people. Obviously, you wouldn't want to write so poorly that people couldn't read it, or print your piece out of a computer in some weird kind of type. On the other hand, artwork, a nice cover, or an introduction that explains who you are, what your piece is about, or why you wrote it, can be very nice. Look at some published books that you like and take ideas from those. Just remember, the point of publishing is to make your writing as readable and as attractive to your audience as possible.

The Frog Leap

This is a true story about my childhood. It was the year 1987 and I was two months old. I was in my old house, the one I was born in. I was on my changing table. My Mom and Dad were with me, they were reading right over to the changing table. That's the weird part. I was being read to and my legs were kicking. My parents were talking to me and saying, "That's all a mother frog has while really caring for her child." I heard like a faint voice the heater which had always been like this. The heater was in between the changing table and my dresser. Luckily the heater was not on but I did get hurt. When I was finished hearing I got out there covered in burns. My Mom and Dad and I stood at each other and then on all screamed. My Mom picked me up and we all went over to the wall for a large candle lamp.

The End

1 Create the Final Copy



2 Add Artwork if You Want



Publish Your Work!

You've worked like a dog to get your piece drafted, revised, and edited. Now it's time to make it look good. During the publishing stage, you can do whatever you want to make your writing appealing to the eye. For example, Sonja wanted to draw some pictures, and she wanted to format her writing in a special font that looks like handwriting. Go ahead, try a few wild ideas, but remember that whatever you do, people have to be able to read and understand it when you're done.

6

PUBLISHING

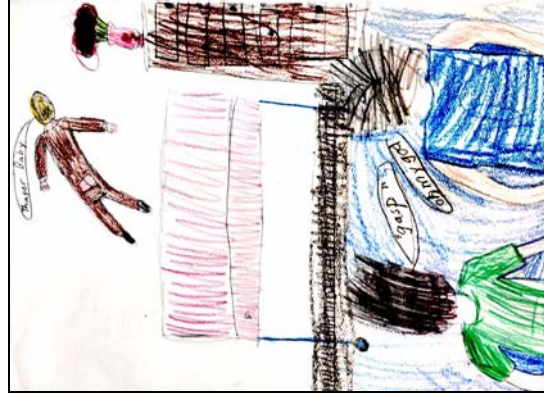
- ▶ *At this point you are only focusing on the visual presentation of your writing.*
- ▶ *Your goal in the publishing stage is to make your writing look as good as it sounds (or even better!). Just remember, if people can't read it, they ain't gonna need it. Make sure your work is easy to read when you're done.*

The Frog Leap

by
Sonja Butler

This is a true story about my childhood. It was the year 1997 and I was ten months old. I was in my old house, the one I was born in. I was on my changing table. My Mom and Dad were with me, they were standing right next to the changing table. That's the weird part. I was being cute and wagging my little cute bottom. My parents were smiling, how cute I was and smiling. Then I did a sudden frog leap which really scared my parents! I bounced like a ball into the heater with my damp little ribs. The heater was in between the changing table and my dresser. Luckily the heater was not on but I did get hurt. When I was three and crawling I just sat there covered in bruises. My Mom and Dad and I started at each other and then we all screamed. My Mom picked me up and we all went over to the couch for a Snuggly sandwich hug.

The End



Teaching Tips

When I first began teaching writing, I gave publishing short shrift. All the learning was over, I thought; publishing is just playtime. But I was wrong. While publishing is probably not as important as revising, it is crucial to realize that, when taught effectively, it can drive the entire writing process.

The reason for this is so simple that I just didn't stop to think about it: the publishing stage focuses the writer's attention directly on purpose and audience. After all, publishing presupposes that the writer's work will be made available to some audience for some purpose. And for some students, this may be the first time in their lives that they've ever thought about their writing in this context.

To guide students in their publishing efforts, ask them to think about these questions:

- ▶ Who are you publishing this piece for? Who would you like to have read this piece?
- ▶ Why are you publishing this piece for that audience? What would you like this group of people to know?
- ▶ What form should your writing take to best reach your audience and help them understand your purpose?

Of course, you'd like your students to know the answers to these questions by the time they finish pre-writing. But because so few students have been exposed to the idea of writing with a specific purpose and for a specific audience, they may only start to get the hang of it by publishing their work.

Here are some solid ideas you can use to develop a repertoire of publishing activities:

- ▶ Formally "install" published pieces in the classroom "library" and make them available for kids to read during reading time.
- ▶ Share published writing regularly in a formal way.
- ▶ Encourage students to add artwork and to bind their books as well.
- ▶ Encourage students to read the published works of other authors in the class and to make constructive comments about the pieces they read.
- ▶ Publish class anthologies.
- ▶ Help students submit their work to magazines and to the local newspapers.
- ▶ Make students aware of Internet publishing opportunities.

The Frog Leap

by
Sonja Butler

This is a true story about my babyhood. It was the year 1987 and I was ten months old. I was in my old house, the one I was born in. I was on my changing table. My Mom and Dad were with me, they were standing right next to the changing table. That's the weird part. I was being cute and wagging my little cute bottom. My parents were admiring how cute I was and smiling. Then I did a sudden frog leap which really scared my parents! I bounced like a ball onto the heater which had skinny little ribs. The heater was in between the changing table and my dresser. Luckily the heater was not on but I did get hurt. When I was finished bouncing I just sat there covered in bruises. My Mom and Dad and I stared at each other and then we all screamed. My Mom picked me up and we all went over to the couch for a Sonja sandwich hug.

The End

Assessing

The Writing Process
Stage Seven



A MESSAGE FROM MR. PEHA

"Back when I was your age (Don't you just hate it when adults say that?) the only person who assessed our work was the teacher. We just got a grade and most of the time we didn't even know why. But guess what? We grew up, and got smarter. Now, we let you do some of the assessing. We still put our two cents in, but at least we can explain with the Six Traits criteria why we feel the way we do. When everybody uses the Six Traits criteria to assess their work, everybody understands the assessment."

Steve Peha

What is Assessing? The word "assess" comes from the Latin word "assidere" meaning "to sit beside." (This does not have anything to do with who sits next to you in class.) The idea here is to pull up a chair right alongside yourself and peak over your own shoulder to see what you've done. Here's how it works: after you've published a piece and let it sit for a while, take it out again and re-read it. Then, jot down a few thoughts about what you did. Are there parts you like more than others? Did you learn something new? What does this piece say about you as a writer? Use the Six Traits criteria to help you analyze your work more closely. Take a look at comments you might have gotten from your teacher or other writers in your class.

What Makes Assessing Hard? Have your teachers been asking you to write down a lot of things about the work you've been doing? Are they always wanting you to tell them what you did and why you did it? Do you ever get tired of it? I think one of the things that makes assessment hard is that we have to do it all the time. Just when we think we're all done, there's this other part we have to deal with. The reason your teachers ask you to assess your own work so often is because it's really important. Assessing your own work helps you learn about how you learn so you can repeat those things that work best for you the next time you have something to do. Learning how to learn is more important than any single skill or piece of information you can acquire because once you learn how to learn, you can learn anything you want.

Do You Really Have to Do This? You don't really have to do anything. But if you don't do anything you won't learn anything. Assessing is very important. Without it, we would have no easy way of charting our own progress, or of determining what we needed to learn next. I'll admit, as a teacher, that part of why we ask you to do this is to help us. The more we learn about what you learn, the better we can help you learn more. But you'll get a lot of out this, too. After you've done it two or three times, you'll start to see some very interesting patterns. You'll start

to notice things you usually do well, and things you probably haven't mastered yet. You'll develop a better sense of yourself as a writer, and that will help you develop a better sense for writing.

What I did well on	What I need to work on
1. I wrote a good opening sentence.	1. I need to work on my topic sentence.
2. I used good evidence to support my thesis.	2. I need to work on my conclusion.
3. I wrote a good conclusion.	3. I need to work on my topic sentence.
4. I used good evidence to support my thesis.	4. I need to work on my conclusion.

1 Reflect on Your Work

Student: *Sara Foster* Paper: *The Frog Leap* Date: *12/20/08*

4 Ideas	When a good idea comes to mind, it's important to write it down. I did this in my paper. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook.
3/4 Organization	I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook.
4 Voice	I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook.
3/4 Word Choice	I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook.
3 Sentence Fluency	I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook.
3 Conventions	I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook. I wrote down my ideas in my notebook.

2 Review Comments



3 Think About Your Next Piece!

Reflect on Your Accomplishment

Thought you were finished, didn't you? Not quite. Actually, in some ways, this last stage might be the most important one of all. You see, everybody wants to be a better writer. (Yes, even you!) And probably the best way to get better is to find out what you're doing well and what you need to do better. It's especially important to know what you're good at already because it's always easier to learn through your strengths than to concentrate on your weaknesses.

There are many ways to assess your performance. Every source you used during the responding stage is a good source for feedback now. Here's one approach using the Six Traits:

7 ASSESSING

> Use the Six Traits to find out what works for you and what doesn't.

IDEAS Interesting Things to Say	ORGANIZATION The Way It Goes Together	VOICE Sounds Like You're Talking	CONVENTIONS Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar, Capitalization, etc.
<p>Q: What are your favorite parts of this paper?</p> <p>When I did a sudden leap. Because it sounded so active.</p> <p>Q: What part could you tell the reader more about so they would understand it better?</p> <p>Not any part</p>	<p>Q: What's the best thing about the way your paper is organized? Why?</p> <p>It goes from how old I was in what I was doing and it has a happy ending. It doesn't give away the fun part till the middle.</p> <p>Q: How could you improve the organization of your paper?</p>	<p>Q: What part of this paper sounds most like you? Why?</p> <p>The frog leap! Because I'm jumpy</p> <p>Q: How could you make other parts sound like that?</p>	<p>Q: Do you think you did a good job with spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and other conventions? Why?</p> <p>Yes!</p> <p>Because I got help.</p> <p>Q: Are there any parts of your paper that you think someone might have trouble reading? Which parts?</p>
WORD CHOICE The Best Words for Your Ideas	SENTENCE FLUENCY The Way It Sounds When You Read It Out Loud		
<p>Q: What are your favorite words in this paper? Why?</p> <p>Cute, sudden and frog leap</p> <p>Because they sound like me.</p> <p>Q: Are there any words you would like to change to make the paper more interesting? Which ones?</p>	<p>Q: What are your favorite sentences in this paper? Why?</p> <p>This is a true story about my babyhood. Because I like baby and true stories.</p> <p>Q: Are there any sentences you would like to change to make them sound better? Which ones?</p>		

You can see that Sonja feels pretty good about this piece; there are only a few areas where she thinks she could have done better. For her next piece, she may want to make some specific improvements like working on her conventions, for example. She will also want to make sure she continues to work on her strengths of writing true stories about her life that have moments of excitement in them.

Teaching Tips

Where does the learning happen? More and more, as I find myself getting caught up in the theory and implementation of writing instruction, that's the question I focus on. Clearly, there are opportunities for growth at any stage of the writing process, but are there key points where we can help kids have those wonderful "Aha!" experiences, when real learning is more likely to happen? I think there are.

It's logical to think that kids are "getting it" when we give a lesson, but most of them aren't, and the ones who seem like they are are usually just aping back those learned behaviors that we've come to mistakenly interpret as understanding and intelligence.

It's also logical to think that the learning is taking place when the kids are actually writing. And to a great extent this is true; certainly there is no real learning without it. But I think it's fair to wonder just how much learning could be taking place when so much of a student's mental bandwidth is being used to solve the problems of the moment.

Since starting to use Six Traits, I have come to believe that the learning happens primarily in two places: during the responding stage and during assessing stage. And the mechanism that makes everything go is the Six Traits criteria—both the written criteria students use for self-assessment, and the language of the criteria that other students will use to comment on an author's work.

True learning is often the result of conscious reflection. And reflecting on the Six Traits criteria—assessing a piece of writing in light of that standard—is a powerful reflective experience that I believe has a profoundly positive effect.

Without this kind of formal reflection, key insights may be lost. This is not to say that they won't resurface, but catching them right here, when the piece is finished and the mind is full of the process that has just occurred, may allow students to take more of their achievements with them when they move on to tackle their next piece.

This is also the best time for you as a teacher to understand how your students are doing. Yes, you can intuit things from the work itself—the Six Traits criteria and Direct Writing Assessment are excellent tools. But an assessment merely indicates what a child can do at present; a formal written reflection can tell you how likely a child is to improve in the future. It can also help to clarify certain things for you with regard to areas of your assessment that may not be conclusive.

IDEAS
Interesting Things to Say

- ✎ What's your favorite part of this paper?
Why?
When I did a sudden frog leap.
Because it sounded so active.
- ✎ What part could you tell the reader more about so they would understand it better?
Not any part.

WORD CHOICE
The Best Words For Your Ideas

- ✎ What are your favorite words in this paper?
Why?
Cute, sudden and frog leap.
Because they sound like ME!
- ✎ Are there any words you would like to change to make the paper more interesting? Which ones?

ORGANIZATION
The Way it Goes Together

- ✎ What's the best thing about the way your paper is organized? Why?
I t goes from how old I was to what I was doing and it has a happy ending.
I t doesn't give away the fun part till the middle.
- ✎ How could you improve the organization of your paper?

SENTENCE FLUENCY
The Way it Sounds When You Read it Out Loud

- ✎ What are your favorite sentences in this paper? Why?
This is a true story about my babyhood.
Because I like babys and true storys.
- ✎ Are there any sentences you would like to change to make them sound better? Which ones?

VOICE
Sounds Like You Talking

- ✎ What part of this paper sounds most like you? Why?
The frog leap.
Because I'm jumpy.
- ✎ How could you make other parts sound like that?

CONVENTIONS
Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar, Capitals, Etc.

- ✎ Do you think you did a good job with spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitals, and other conventions? Why?
Yes!
Because I got help.
- ✎ Are there any parts of your paper that you think someone might have trouble reading? Which parts?

Seek a Wider Audience

Another cool thing to do after you've published a piece of writing is to send it off to another publisher. Sonja decided to send her piece to a magazine called *Stone Soup*. But to do that, she had to write a submission letter to the editor telling her why she thought her piece would be of interest to the readers of her magazine. She wrote a rough draft of the letter first and then typed it up.

7 ASSESSING

► If you've assessed your own work, you can tell someone else why they might like it.

Dear Editor...
I like my story because
it sounds like me.
I'm always hyper
I get really silly and
I like to right that's
why I wrote this story
I think other people
should read my story
because it's not just

some fiddle-faddle
true!
I organized my paper from what
year it was and where I was.
It's like a hill. It gets more
exciting in the middle.
and it has a happy ending.
It's not only talking to kids it's
also talking to adults

November 25, 1996

Stone Soup
Children's Art Foundation
P.O. Box 83
Santa Cruz, CA 95063

Dear Editor,

I like my story because it sounds like me! I'm always hyper. I get really silly. I love to read and write. I think other people should read my story because it is not some fiddle-faddle fiction. It is true! I organized my paper from what year it was and where I was and in the middle you can tell my parents were surprised when I did the frog leap and it is not only talking to kids it is also talking to adults.

Sincerely,

Sonja

Teaching Tips

If it is through publishing that children begin to realize the importance of their audience, why is this activity here? Because I believe there is a very important kind of assessment going on in a writer's mind when they seek a type of outlet for their work outside of the usual venues of the classroom and school communities. When writer's begin to consider widening their audience, they are forced to engage in a basic but powerful form of self-assessment. They have to ask themselves, "Will the people I am submitting my work to understand and enjoy it?"

To this end, I would encourage every writer, young or old, to make a case for their effort, to root strongly its strengths, to highlight its highlights, to point out for anyone who might not have noticed just how much there is in the piece that might be worthy of note. To do this effectively, a writer needs an analytic vocabulary, and the only place a writer can get such a vocabulary is from the criteria he or she has internalized that, in their opinion, define high quality work.

What intrigues me about this particular activity is its authenticity. Yes, the narrative reflection based on specific prompts drawn from the Six Traits is valuable and interesting, but this is real. In a sense it is true literature response, but in this case reader and writer are one and the same.

Something like this also represents a quick turnaround publishing opportunity which, among other things, will afford students yet another chance to develop their knowledge of writing conventions. The value of such incidental activities should not be doubted. Short, authentic publishing opportunities like this are critical to a young writer's development. In many classrooms across the country, students turn out 20 or 30 such published pieces per year.

Beyond writing letters, students can write pieces that approximate the foreword one might find in a book by a professional writer. These pieces serve to introduce and interpret the writing for the reader. They also serve to clarify the author's intention and, like the work done during revision, they encourage children to re-read their own work thereby gaining additional insight.

It's interesting to note exactly what young writers are willing to say about themselves and their own work. You may notice, for example, that a student will write one thing for readers who know her, and quite another for readers who don't. This is a wonderful window into the development of the writer's voice, something that can be difficult at times to pin down.

November 25, 1996

Stone Soup
Children's Art Foundation
P.O. Box 83
Santa Cruz, CA 95083

Dear Editor,

I like my story because it sounds like me. I 'm always hyper. I get really silly. I love to read and write. I think other people should read my story because it is not just some fiddle-faddle fiction, it is true! I organized my paper from what year it was and where I was, and in the middle you can tell my parents were surprised when I did the frog leap, and it is not only talking to kids it is also talking to adults.

Sincerely,

Sonja

Compare With Your Previous Piece

Another great way to learn about your own writing is to compare your current work with work you did before. The piece called “grown up” was the last piece Sonja wrote before “The Frog Leap.” When she wrote “grown up” she didn’t know how to use Six Traits or the Writing Process. What differences do you notice in the two pieces? Do you think Sonja’s writing has improved?

7

ASSESSING

► *Comparing current work with old work is the best way to see how far you’ve come.*

grown up

When I grow up I will have a nice relaxing life. A good career. A nice boss. A husband who is nice. Lots of pets. A farm is what I want. I will live in a cottage with my husband and a child. I will have a happy life. I will live in Norway. I will be a champion horse rider. I will live in a valley. My job will be something that fits in with me. I will be smart.

The Frog Leap

by
Sonja Butler

This is a true story about my childhood. It was the year 1997 and I was ten months old. I was in my old house, the one I was born in. I was on my changing table. My Mom and Dad were with me. They were standing right next to the changing table. There's the weird part. I was being cute and wagging my little cute bottom. My parents were adding how cute I was and saying, "Then I did a sudden frog leap which really scared my parents!" I bounced like a ball onto the heater which had shiny little ribs. The heater was in between the changing table and my dresser. Luckily the heater was not on but I did get hurt. When I was finished laughing I just sat there covered in bruises. My Mom and Dad and I stared at each other and then we all screamed. My Mom picked me up and we all went over to the couch for a Sonja sandwich hug.

The End

Teaching Tips

When we were in school, each writing assignment was a world unto itself. And if you were like me (and I suspect most other kids, too) that world came to an abrupt end when it was handed back covered with red ink and a grade you didn’t understand, stuffed in a folder, taken home, and shortly thereafter thrown away. Back then a piece of writing was just an assignment, and writing students were just kids who couldn’t spell well, print legibly, or write grammatically.

But things are a little different today as most of us now realize that when we encourage children to take a more formal attitude toward their accomplishments, by giving them powerful tools to do so, we are capitalizing on valuable learning opportunities. To this end, I think it is helpful—to both teacher and student—to think of the child as a writer (not a student of writing) and the work that writer does as somehow comprising a career. After all, we now ask children to compose real pieces for real people and real purposes, why not think of them as real writers?

Portfolios are probably the most formal hint that this shift has taken place. But most teachers only do portfolios once or twice a year. I would like to see students reflecting on their progress more often and in a less time consuming way.

Can young children develop a sense of their own development? I think they can. In fact, whenever I’ve asked kids to reflect in writing on the previous year in their development, they can almost always point to significant changes in their abilities and attitudes. And even if their assessments aren’t strictly accurate I think they act almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is to say that I believe many children, simply by articulating specific improvements in their writing, may in fact be helping to psych themselves up, to see into their work and its potential in as hopeful a way as possible.

This is one of those activities I truly enjoy because even when it doesn’t work it does. Even if students can’t articulate any improvements, or the differences they notice are somewhat superficial, they are still learning a process that will serve them well when they mature enough to take advantage of it.

By encouraging children to compare current work with past work, we invite them to regard all of their efforts as one big piece of writing, an unbroken chain of expression stretching back to kindergarten and perhaps even before. This can be a very profound experience for a child, something that can give rise to that special feeling we want all children to have, that feeling that says: “Hey, I’m a writer.”

Review Any Comments You Receive

Just as you did during the responding stage, you may get written comments now. For example, if you share your writing with the class or publish it for the class library, some of your readers may want to tell you things about it. In addition, your teacher may want to give you some detailed feedback using the Six Traits criteria to help you understand what you did well and what you might think about improving the next time you work on another piece.

7 ASSESSING

> When you get detailed comments like this, be sure to hang onto them.

Student: Sonja Butler Paper: The Frog Leap Date: 12/3/96	
score 4	Ideas – The heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme and supporting details. When a great thing to write about! It reminds me of when I was a little baby and I swallowed a safety pin. My parents were so scared I was going to die. I like the part where you said, "It bounced like a ball onto the heater which had skinny little ribs." That's a great detail. I could really see it happening. I would have enjoyed more details like that.
score 3/4	Organization – The internal structure, the thread of central meaning, the logical pattern of ideas. Pretty well organized. I like the order you told things. If you'd had been able to include more details then splitting the story up into paragraphs might have made it even better. Each idea lead to the next one and I never felt lost—that's great. I liked the ending, too. I'm glad you were all right. I was worried there for a minute.
score 4	Voice – The heart and soul, the magic, the wit, the writer's unique personal expression emerging through words. This sounds just like you; full of energy and enthusiasm. I especially liked it when you wrote "It was being cute and wagging my little cute bottom." And I like the phrase "a Sonja sandwich hug." That's a great expression. When you put in details like this it helps your audience feel what you felt.
score 3/4	Word Choice – Rich, colorful, precise language that moves and enlightens; a love of language, a passion for words. Nice job. How did you decide to call what you did a "frog leap"? That's a really good descriptive phrase. I like the word "babyhood," too; it's so much more original and more precise than "childhood."
score 3	Sentence Fluency – The rhythm and flow of the language; the way the writing plays to the ear, not just to the eye. Your paper reads very easily, but a lot of your sentences start with "I." To make it a little more interesting you might try starting some of your sentences in other ways. You're very good with <i>alliteration</i> (that's when you use several words that have the same starting sound). I especially like the sound of: "I bounced like a ball..." and "...a Sonja sandwich hug."
score 3	Conventions – The mechanical correctness of the writing and its contribution to meaning and readability. You did a good job on your spelling. I liked the way you circled the words you weren't sure of and then looked them up in the dictionary. You used periods and capitals well, too. Did you know that there are two kinds of "which"? There's "which" as in Halloween and "which" as in "which one." Words that sound the same but are spelled differently are called <i>homophones</i> . We'll have a lesson on that soon.
<i>You did a wonderful job on this paper, Sonja. I really appreciate how hard you worked from the very first pre-writing session through all your drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. You put in a lot of effort and it really shows. You have a wonderful voice that just pops right off the page. I can't wait to read your next paper. Think about including more detail in your next piece. You have a real talent for coming up with interesting ways to say things. I think you also tell great stories about your life. Do you have any other experiences you could write about?</i>	

Scoring Guide: 1-Beginning > 2-Emerging > 3-Developing > 4-Measuring > 5-Strong

Teaching Tips

All writers, no matter how small, want to know what others think of their work. No writer's assessment of her own achievement would be complete if the assessment of others weren't factored in to some degree.

All too often I think we're inclined to soft-pedal this issue of response. It's funny really. In our reading programs we ask our children to give us thick, meaty responses to the books they read. But then we turn around as their teachers and serve up marshmallow fluff: "I really enjoyed your paper. You have a way with words. A wonderful effort! You are a very talented writer. I can't wait to read your next piece."

Of course, as caring adults ever mindful of the fragile egos in our charge, we pull our punches so as not to hurt their feelings. But I think, sometimes, the children are aware of our duplicity, and even if they aren't, they get very tired of hearing what talented little people they are (I certainly did), especially when they know they are not always so talented.

The crux of the problem is that, traditionally, we have relied upon a very personal vocabulary to describe a student's work. Because we had no words to actually talk about the writing, we talked about the writer instead. And the consequences were, in many cases, quite devastating as many young people began to equate ideas like "I'm not a good speller," with "I'm not a good writer," with "I'm not a good person."

But the analytic vocabulary of Six Traits gives us better leverage. It allows us to comment in an in-depth fashion on the writing itself in a way that children who have been introduced to the criteria can understand and deal with effectively. By giving them the same comments you expect them to hand out to others—the same comments you expect them to make about the books they read—you take the sting out of criticism, and give legitimacy to praise.

When students comment to each other, we are often afraid that they won't adequately consider their classmates' feelings. To a certain extent this is true. Consideration for others takes many years to develop. (So why not practice it regularly?) To mitigate this potential problem I tell students they should use the vocabulary of the traits and any related vocabulary we have developed in class when speaking to students about their writing. When a student feels like saying, "That was stupid," I direct them to their Six Traits criteria and ask them if they can find this comment anywhere on the sheet. I don't want to restrict discussion, I just want to encourage a healthy exchange.

score

4

Ideas ➤ The heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme and supporting details.

What a great thing to write about! It reminds me of when I was a little baby and I swallowed a safety pin. My parents were scared, too. I like the part where you said: "I bounced like a ball onto the heater which had skinny little ribs." That's a great detail. I could really see it happening. I would have enjoyed more details like that.

score

3/4

Organization ➤ The internal structure, the thread of central meaning, the logical pattern of ideas.

Pretty well organized. I like the order you told things in. Each idea lead to the next and I never felt lost. I liked the ending, too. I'm glad you were all right. I was worried there for a minute. If you had included more details then splitting the story up into paragraphs would have made it even better.

score

4

Voice ➤ The heart and soul, the magic, the wit; the writer's unique personal expression emerging through words.

This sounds just like you, full of energy and enthusiasm. I especially liked it when you wrote "I was being cute and wagging my little cute bottom." And I like the phrase "a Sonja sandwich hug." That's a great expression. When you put in details like this it helps your audience feel what you felt.

score

3/4

Word Choice ➤ Rich, colorful, precise language that moves and enlightens; a love of language, a passion for words.

Nice job. How did you decide to call what you did a "frog leap"? That's a really good descriptive phrase. I like the word "babyhood," too; it's so much more original than "childhood."

score

3

Sentence Fluency ➤ The rhythm and flow of the language; the way the writing plays to the ear, not just to the eye.

Your paper reads very easily, but a lot of your sentences start with "I". To make it a little more interesting you might try starting some of your sentences in other ways. You're very good with *alliteration* (that's when you use several words that have the same starting sound). I especially like the sound of: "I bounced like a ball..." and "...a Sonja sandwich hug."

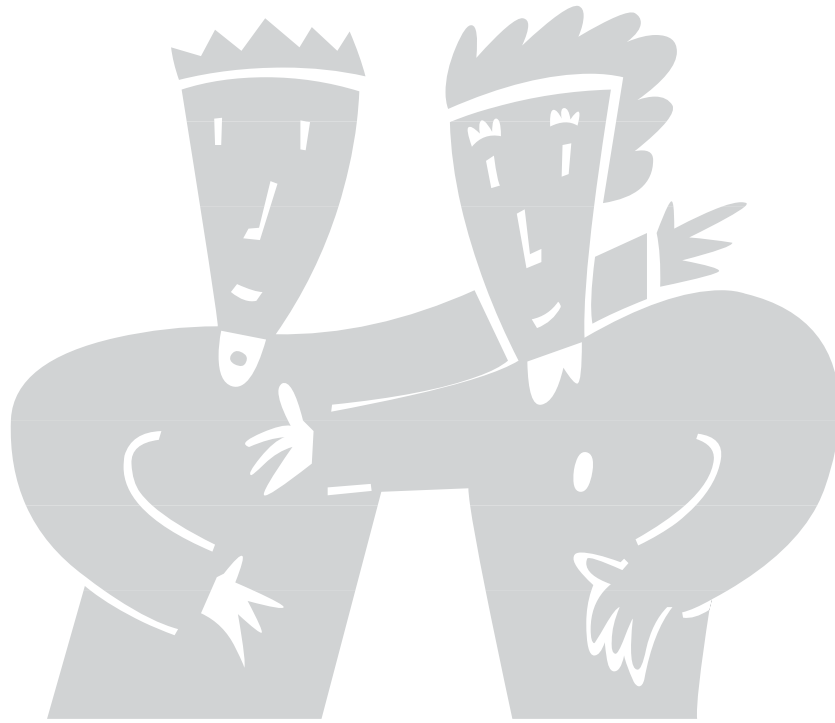
score

3

Conventions ➤ The mechanical correctness of the writing and its contribution to meaning and readability.

You did a good job on your spelling. I liked the way you circled the words you weren't sure of and then looked them up in the dictionary. You used periods and capitals well, too. Did you know that there are two kinds of "witch"? There's "witch" as in Halloween and "which" as in "which one." Words that sound the same but are spelled differently are called *homophones*. We'll have a lesson on that soon. I'll also show you how to break your stories up into paragraphs.

You did a wonderful job on this paper, Sonja. I really appreciate how hard you worked from the very first pre-writing session through all your drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. You put in a lot of effort and it really shows. You have a wonderful voice that just pops right off the page. I can't wait to read your next piece.



Let's work together to
make your teaching
the best it can be.

Please contact me any time!

Even the best workshops and teaching materials can't meet the needs of every teacher all the time.

That's why we need to stay in touch. Send me an e-mail any time you have a question.

*I'll do my best to get back to you quickly with answers, additional teaching materials,
or other resources.*

Please send suggestions, questions, and corrections to:
stevepeha@ttms.org

Learning Patterns

Teach Smarter Not Harder

Imagine a structure 13 years tall, 180 days wide, and five subjects deep. This is a K-12 education. Each cell in this structure represents a single class period in a single subject for a total of 11,700 educational opportunities.

By using *Teaching That Makes Sense® Learning Patterns™* we can reduce this academic load for students, simplify planning and instruction for teachers, and help more kids learn more things in less time and with less teacher effort.

Learning Patterns are cross-curricular tools optimized for successful teaching in any subject or grade. They are designed to be used, re-used, and shared across classrooms without requiring extensive training or preparation.

By analyzing standards documents and the methods of effective teachers, *Teaching That Makes Sense* has identified underlying commonalities in learning targets across the curriculum. These commonalities represent dozens of potential assignments that can be taught and learned through a small set of foundational skills.

Consider exposition. Students consume and create expository information in many ways: they read expository texts, write expository essays, create reports, answer test questions, etc. As varied as expository expression is, it has a simple underlying structure that can be explained by a single *Learning Pattern*.

Some *Learning Patterns* cover skills like narration, exposition, and persuasion. Others help teachers and students with things like assessment, reading comprehension, and memorization. The same patterns can be used across grade levels and subject areas as well, so kids take their learning with them as they grow.

For more information about Learning Patterns click [here](#).



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Agile Transformation

Building Collective Capacity for School-Wide Change

We are discovering better ways of improving schools by doing it and by helping others do it. Through this work, we have come to value:

- **People.** *Individuals and interactions* over policy and politics;
- **Achievement.** *Maximum potential* over minimum competence;
- **Courage.** *Fierce collaboration* over comfortable compromise;
- **Agility.** *Responding to change* over following a plan.

The items on the right are important, but we value the items on the left more.

Agile Transformation is grounded in two principles: **(1)** People are more successful when they enjoy their work; and **(2)** Schools are more successful when they support people in developing the autonomy, competence, and relatedness that makes their work more enjoyable. Features of *Agile Transformation* include:

- **Paired Practice.** Nobody works alone. Everyone has a team and a teammate.
- **Rapid Iteration.** Sprint through big problems one small problem at a time.
- **Making Sense.** What do we do? Why do we do it? How do we know it works?
- **“Stand Up” Sessions.** What did you do yesterday? What are you doing today? What do you need to be successful? Agile leaders remove impediments.
- **Successful Failure.** Fail fast, fail smart. No blame games. Apply what you learn as you move closer to your goal with each iteration.
- **Souls and Roles.** Aligning what we do with who we are.
- **“Just in Time” Solutions.** Handle problems as they arise. Respond as needed.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Essential Elements of Agile Schools

The Qualities of Effective Educational Communities

1. **Agile schools work because people choose to make them work.** We believe in freedom of choice, and that making the choice to participate fully in teaching, learning, and leading is the most important choice we can make.
2. **Agile schools love to learn.** We believe that learning is inherently enjoyable and that giving learners a responsible degree of autonomy in their individual pursuit of knowledge and skill makes it even more so. Agile educators are learners, too.
3. **Agile schools take a constructive approach to failure.** We believe failure is a normal part of success. Kids struggle to learn. Teachers struggle to teach. Administrators struggle to lead. We all experience failure on the way to solving new problems. The faster we fail, the more solutions we try. The smarter we fail, the more knowledge we bring to the next iteration. Instead of looking back at problems, Agile schools look forward to solving them.
4. **Agile schools are always getting better.** We believe there's almost always a better way of doing something, and that it's almost always worthwhile trying to figure out what that better way is. Agile schools value progress, and the appropriate measurement thereof, because progress is the true indicator of learning.
5. **Agile schools empower people to empower others.** We believe that individuals—not systems or policies—are the true sources of power in our schools. Our responsibility is to use our power in service of the greater good, and to teach students how to use their power that way, too.
6. **Agile schools achieve extraordinary results.** We believe in transformative learning that goes far beyond incremental improvements in test scores. Adults in Agile schools also strive for extraordinary achievement in their profession as well.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Essential Elements

continued...

7. **Agile schools are based on deeply-held beliefs, clearly-articulated values, and a firmly-rooted sense of commitment.** We believe that the most successful schools are those run by people who know what matters most to them and who possess an unshakable determination to get it.
8. **Agile schools are communities where people make a difference and connect with something greater than themselves.** We believe that the drive to contribute is part of human nature. Our role is to guide people in directing their contribution toward its highest and best use.
9. **Agile schools value ownership, positive attitudes, high expectations, and unwavering optimism.** We believe that making a good life is about making good choices, that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right, and that self-mastery is the key to its rightful exercise.
10. **Agile schools embrace the risk inherent in the achievement of great things.** We educate for maximum potential not minimum competence. We believe that all learners have within them extraordinary strengths and untapped resources, and that learning is only limited by our willingness to attempt what has never before been attempted. We welcome change, we innovate, and we seek out challenges that organize and measure the best of our energies and skills.
11. **Agile schools affirm self-knowledge as the most valuable knowledge and self-determination as the most basic right.** We believe that introspection, self-disclosure, and intellectual honesty are essential to personal transformation. We seek to support young people in becoming the adults they want to be.
12. **Agile schools are communities where no one is above the rules, everyone has a voice, freedom is sacred, equity and excellence are not mutually exclusive, and the highest goal of education is contributing to the present and future well-being of individuals who can thrive independently in a modern democracy.** Agile schools value college preparation, career fulfillment, and engaged citizenship, but we value something else even more. Collegiate, career, and civic achievement are important, but they are means to ends, not ends in themselves. Human happiness, meaningful contribution, and sustained well-being of self and community are the ultimate ends to which Agile schools aspire on behalf of the children and families we serve.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”